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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Seventh

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First Prize $2,000
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Conditions of the Contest

1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, EQMM will award the following: one (1) Award of Merit of $1,000; four (4) Second Prizes of $500 each, and four (4) Third Prizes of $250 each. All prizes cover first American and Canadian publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at EQMM's regular rates. It is understood that, while authors retain all radio and television rights, there will be no radio or television use of stories bought through this contest until the stories have been published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Mercury Publications, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1951.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by December 31, 1951. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1952.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $35 for the original edition, $25 for reprint editions, $25 for British book anthology rights, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

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Complete List of the 30 Prize-Winning Stories in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest

HONOR ROLL OF THE DETECTIVE-CRIME SHORT STORY, 1951

FIRST PRIZE

The Enemy	by Charlotte Armstrong

SECOND PRIZES

Murder at City Hall	by A. H. Z. Carr
Fool's Mate	by Stanley Ellin
'Bye, 'Bye, Bluebeard	by Viola Brothers Shore
The Hair Shirt	by Roy Vickers
Cherchez la Frame	by Craig Rice and Stuart Palmer

THIRD PRIZES

All the Way to the Moon	by Q. Patrick
The Contradictory Case	by Hugh Pentecost
Woman Hunt No Good	by Oliver La Farge
Flowers for an Angel	by Nigel Morland
Adventure of Andorus Enterprises	by T. S. Stribling

ADDED PRIZES

The Newtonian Egg	by Peter Godfrey
Let Freedom Ring	by Kem Bennett
Buck Fever	by Mary Adams Sarett

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST "MYSTERY"

The Man Whose Wishes Came True	by C. S. Forester

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST SPY STORY

Most Dangerous Man in the World	by Lord Dunsany

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST HUMOROUS STORY

P. Moran, Personal Observer	by Percival Wilde

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST HISTORICAL STORY

The Triple-Lock'd Room	by Lillian de la Torre

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SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST PASTICHE (of Raffles)

A Costume Piece by Barry Perowne

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST GHOST STORY

Only Ghosts Stay Young by Laurence Kirk

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST SHERLOCKIANA

International Investigators, Inc. by Edward G. Ashton

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST SHORT-SHORT STORY

"O Time, in Your Flight" by Vincent Cornier

FOR THE DETECTIVE-STORY WRITERS' DETECTIVE STORY

The 51st Sealed Room; or, The MWA Murder by Robert Arthur

SPECIAL AWARDS FOR THE BEST FIRST STORIES

Perchance to Dream by Lisa Robineau
His First Bow by J. W. Wells
Corpus Delicti by Harry Miner
Like An Apple by Walter E. Chaulk
Gifts for His Highness by Sam Young
Vertigo by Guy de Vry
Punchinello, Funny Fellow by Robert Passano

The story that won First Prize in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest — Charlotte Armstrong's "The Enemy" — is more than a detective story: it is a detective story plus. *The message it contains is far more important than merely who did it, or how it was done — even more important than why it was done. Charlotte Armstrong's story reveals the meaning, the purpose, and the goodness of truth — and conversely, the menace, the peril, and the godlessness of truth's Enemy. You will not forget this First Prize story for a long, long time . . .*

Charlotte Armstrong is no stranger to discriminating mystery fans. She is the author of such outstanding detective-suspense novels as THE UNSUSPECTED *and* MISCHIEF. *We once predicted in print that Charlotte Armstrong would some day make detective-story history. "The Enemy" not only fulfills that prediction but brings it, vividly and impressively, to life . . .*

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THE ENEMY

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

THEY SAT late at the lunch table and afterwards moved through the dim, cool, high-ceilinged rooms to the Judge's library where, in their quiet talk, the old man's past and the young man's future seemed to telescope and touch. But at twenty minutes after three, on that hot, bright, June Saturday afternoon, the present tense erupted. Out in the quiet street arose the sound of trouble.

Judge Kittinger adjusted his pince-nez, rose, and led the way to his old-fashioned veranda from which they could overlook the tree-roofed intersection of Greenwood Lane and Hannibal Street. Near the steps to the corner house, opposite, there was a surging knot of children and one man. Now, from the house on the Judge's left, a woman in a blue house dress ran diagonally toward the excitement. And a police car slipped up Hannibal Street, gliding to the curb. One tall officer plunged into the group and threw restraining arms around a screaming boy.

Mike Russell, saying to his host, "Excuse me, sir," went rapidly across the street. Trouble's center was the boy, ten or eleven years old, a tow-headed boy, with tawny-lashed blue eyes, a straight nose, a fine brow. He was beside himself, writhing in the policeman's grasp. The woman in the blue dress was yammering at him. "Freddy! Freddy! Freddy!" Her voice simply did not reach his ears.

"You ole stinker! You rotten ole stinker! You ole nut!" All the boy's heart was in the epithets.

"Now, listen . . ." The cop shook the boy who, helpless in those powerful hands, yet blazed. His fury had stung to crimson the face of the grown man at whom it was directed.

This man, who stood with his back to the house as one besieged, was plump, half-bald, with eyes much magnified by glasses. "Attacked me!" he cried in a high whine. "Rang my bell and absolutely leaped on me!"

Out of the seven or eight small boys clustered around them came overlapping fragments of shrill sentences. It was clear only that they opposed the man. A small woman in a print dress, a man in shorts, whose bare chest was winter-white, stood a little apart, hesitant and distressed. Up on the veranda of the house the screen door was half-open, and a woman seated in a wheelchair peered forth anxiously.

On the green grass, in the shade, perhaps thirty feet away, there lay in death a small brown-and-white dog.

The Judge's luncheon guest observed all this. When the Judge drew near, there was a lessening of the noise. Judge Kittinger said, "This is Freddy Titus, isn't it? Mr. Matlin? What's happened?"

The man's head jerked. "I," he

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said, "did nothing to the dog. Why would I trouble to hurt the boy's dog? I try — you know this, Judge — I try to live in peace here. But these kids are terrors! They've made this block a perfect hell for me and my family." The man's voice shook. "My wife, who is not strong . . . My stepdaughter, who is a cripple . . . These kids are no better than a slum gang. They are vicious! That boy rang my bell and *attacked* . . . ! I'll have him up for assault! I . . ."

The Judge's face was old ivory and he was aloof behind it.

On the porch a girl pushed past the woman in the chair, a girl who walked with a lurching gait.

Mike Russell asked, quietly, "Why do the boys say it was you, Mr. Matlin, who hurt the dog?"

The kids chorused. "He's an ole mean . . ." "He's a nut . . ." "Just because . . ." ". . . took Clive's bat and . . ." ". . . chases us . . ." ". . . tries to put everything on us . . ." ". . . told my mother lies . . ." ". . . just because . . ."

He is our enemy, they were saying; *he is our enemy.*

"They . . ." began Matlin, his throat thick with anger.

"Hold it a minute." The second cop, the thin one, walked toward where the dog was lying.

"Somebody," said Mike Russell in a low voice, "must do something for the boy."

The Judge looked down at the frantic child. He said, gently, "I am as sorry as I can be, Freddy . . ." But in his old heart there was too much known, and too many little dogs he remembered that had already died, and even if he were as sorry as he could be, he couldn't be sorry enough. The boy's eyes turned, rejected, returned. To the enemy.

Russell moved near the woman in blue, who pertained to this boy somehow. "His mother?"

"His folks are away. I'm there to take care of him," she snapped, as if she felt herself put upon by a crisis she had not contracted to face.

"Can they be reached?"

"No," she said decisively.

The young man put his stranger's hand on the boy's rigid little shoulder. But he too was rejected. Freddy's eyes, brilliant with hatred, clung to the enemy. Hatred doesn't cry.

"Listen," said the tall cop, "if you could hang onto him for a minute . . ."

"Not I . . ." said Russell.

The thin cop came back. "Looks like the dog got poison. When was he found?"

"Just now," the kids said.

"Where? There?"

"Up Hannibal Street. Right on the edge of ole Matlin's back lot."

"Edge of *my* lot!" Matlin's color freshened again. "On the sidewalk, why don't you say? Why don't you tell the truth?"

"We are! *We* don't tell lies!"

"Quiet, you guys," the cop said. "Pipe down, now."

"Heaven's my witness, I wasn't even here!" cried Matlin. "I played

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nine holes of golf today. I didn't get home until . . . May?" he called over his shoulder. "What time did I come in?"

The girl on the porch came slowly down, moving awkwardly on her uneven legs. She was in her twenties, no child. Nor was she a woman. She said in a blurting manner, "About three o'clock, Daddy Earl. But the dog was dead."

"What's that, Miss?"

"This is my step-daughter . . ."

"The dog was dead," the girl said, "before he came home. I saw it from upstairs, before three o'clock. Lying by the sidewalk."

"You drove in from Hannibal Street, Mr. Matlin? Looks like you'd have seen the dog."

Matlin said with nervous thoughtfulness, "I don't know. My mind . . . Yes, I . . ."

"He's telling a lie!"

"Freddy!"

"Listen to that," said May Matlin, "will you?"

"She's a liar, too!"

The cop shook Freddy. Mr. Matlin made a sound of helpless exasperation. He said to the girl, "Go keep your mother inside, May." He raised his arm as if to wave. "It's all right, honey," he called to the woman in the chair, with a false cheeriness that grated on the ear. "There's nothing to worry about, now."

Freddy's jaw shifted and young Russell's watching eyes winced. The girl began to lurch back to the house.

"It was my wife who put in the call," Matlin said. "After all, they were on me like a pack of wolves. Now, I . . . I *understand* that the boy's upset. But all the same, he cannot . . . He must learn . . . I will not have . . . I have enough to contend with, without this malice, this unwarranted antagonism, this persecution . . ."

Freddy's eyes were unwinking.

"It has got to stop!" said Matlin almost hysterically.

"Yes," murmured Mike Russell, "I should think so." Judge Kittinger's white head, nodding, agreed.

"We've heard about quite a few dog-poisoning cases over the line in Redfern," said the thin cop with professional calm. "None here."

The man in the shorts hitched them up, looking shocked. "Who'd do a thing like that?"

A boy said, boldly, "Ole Matlin would." He had an underslung jaw and wore spectacles on his snub nose. "I'm Phil Bourchard," he said to the cop. He had courage.

"We jist know," said another. "I'm Ernie Allen." Partisanship radiated from his whole thin body. "Ole Matlin doesn't want anybody on his ole property."

"Sure." "He doesn't want anybody on his ole property." "It was ole Matlin."

"It was. It was," said Freddy Titus.

"Freddy," said the housekeeper in blue, "now, you better be still. I'll tell your Dad." It was a meaningless fumble for control. The boy didn't even hear it.

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Judge Kittinger tried, patiently. "You can't accuse without cause, Freddy."

"Bones didn't hurt his ole property. Bones wouldn't hurt anything. Ole Matlin did it."

"You lying little devil!"

"*He's* a liar!"

The cop gave Freddy another shake. "You kids found him, eh?"

"We were up at Bourchard's and were going down to the Titus house."

"And he was dead," said Freddy.

"*I* know nothing about it," said Matlin icily. "Nothing at all."

The cop, standing between, said wearily, "Any of you people see what coulda happened?"

"I was sitting in my backyard," said the man in shorts. "I'm Daugherty, next door, up Hannibal Street. Didn't see a thing."

The small woman in a print dress spoke up. "I am Mrs. Page. I live across on the corner, Officer. I believe I did see a strange man go into Mr. Matlin's driveway this morning."

"When was this, Ma'am?"

"About eleven o'clock. He was poorly dressed. He walked up the drive and around the garage."

"Didn't go to the house?"

"No. He was only there a minute. I believe he was carrying something. He was rather furtive. And very poorly dressed, almost like a tramp."

There was a certain relaxing, among the elders. "Ah, the tramp," said Mike Russell. "The good old reliable tramp. Are you sure, Mrs. Page? It's very unlikely. . . ."

But she bristled. "Do you think I am lying?"

Russell's lips parted, but he felt the Judge's hand on his arm. "This is my guest, Mr. Russell . . . Freddy." The Judge's voice was gentle. "Let him go, Officer. I'm sure he understands, now. Mr. Matlin was not even at home, Freddy. It's possible that this . . . er . . . stranger . . . Or it may have been an accident . . ."

"Wasn't a tramp. Wasn't an accident."

"You can't know that, boy," said the Judge, somewhat sharply. Freddy said nothing. As the officer slowly released his grasp, the boy took a free step, backwards, and the other boys surged to surround him. There stood the enemy, the monster who killed and lied, and the grown-ups with their reasonable doubts were on the monster's side. But the boys knew what Freddy knew. They stood together.

"Somebody," murmured the Judge's guest, "somebody's got to help the boy." And the Judge sighed.

The cops went up Hannibal Street, towards Matlin's back lot, with Mr. Daugherty. Matlin lingered at the corner talking to Mrs. Page. In the front window of Matlin's house the curtain fell across the glass.

Mike Russell sidled up to the housekeeper. "Any uncles or aunts here in town? A grandmother?"

"No," she said, shortly.

"Brothers or sisters, Mrs. . . . ?"

"Miz Somers. No, he's the only one. Only reason they didn't take him

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along was it's the last week of school and he didn't want to miss."

Mike Russell's brown eyes suggested the soft texture of velvet, and they were deeply distressed. She slid away from their appeal. "He'll just have to take it, I guess, like everybody else," Mrs. Somers said. "These things happen."

He was listening intently. "Don't you care for dogs?"

"I don't mind a dog," she said. She arched her neck. She was going to call to the boy.

"Wait. Tell me, does the family go to church? Is there a pastor or a priest who knows the boy?"

"They don't go, far as I ever saw." She looked at him as if he were an eccentric.

"Then school. He has a teacher. What grade?"

"Sixth grade," she said. "Miss Dana. Oh, he'll be O.K." Her voice grew loud, to reach the boy and hint to him. "He's a big boy."

Russell said, desperately, "Is there no way to telephone his parents?"

"They're on the road. They'll be in some time tomorrow. That's all I know." She was annoyed. "I'll take care of him. That's why I'm here." She raised her voice and this time it was arch and seductive. "Freddy, better come wash your face. I know where there's some chocolate cookies."

The velvet left the young man's eyes. Hard as buttons, they gazed for a moment at the woman. Then he whipped around and left her. He walked over to where the kids had drifted, near the little dead creature on the grass. He said softly, "Bones had his own doctor, Freddy? Tell me his name?" The boy's eyes flickered. "We must know what it was that he took. A doctor can tell. I think his own doctor would be best, don't you?"

The boy nodded, mumbled a name, an address. That Russell mastered the name and the numbers, asking for no repetition, was a sign of his concern. Besides, it was this young man's quality — that he listened. "May I take him, Freddy? I have a car. We ought to have a blanket," he added softly, "a soft, clean blanket."

"I got one, Freddy . . ." "My mother'd let me . . ."

"I can get one," Freddy said brusquely. They wheeled, almost in formation.

Mrs. Somers frowned. "You must let them take a blanket," Russell warned her, and his eyes were cold.

"I will explain to Mrs. Titus," said the Judge quickly.

"Quite a fuss," she said, and tossed her head and crossed the road.

Russell gave the Judge a quick nervous grin. He walked to the returning cops. "You'll want to run tests, I suppose? Can the dog's own vet do it?"

"Certainly. Humane officer will have to be in charge. But that's what the vet'll want."

"I'll take the dog, then. Any traces up there?"

"Not a thing."

"Will you explain to the boy that you are investigating?"

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"Well, you know how these things go." The cop's feet shuffled. "Humane officer does what he can. Probably, Monday, after we identify the poison, he'll check the drug stores. Usually, if it *is* a cranky neighbor, he has already put in a complaint about the dog. This Matlin says he never did. The humane officer will get on it, Monday. He's out of town today. The devil of these cases, we can't prove a thing, usually. You get an idea who it was, maybe you can scare him. It's a misdemeanor, all right. Never heard of a conviction, myself."

"But will you explain to the boy . . . ?" Russell stopped, chewed his lip, and the Judge sighed.

"Yeah, it's tough on a kid," the cop said.

When the Judge's guest came back, it was nearly five o'clock. He said, "I came to say goodbye, sir, and to thank you for the . . ." But his mind wasn't on the sentence and he lost it and looked up.

The Judge's eyes were affectionate. "Worried?"

"Judge, sir," the young man said, "*must* they feed him? Where, sir, in this classy neighborhood is there an understanding woman's heart? I herded them to that Mrs. Allen. But she winced, sir, and she diverted them. She didn't want to deal with tragedy, didn't want to think about it. She offered cakes and cokes and games."

"But my dear boy . . ."

"What do they teach the kids these days, Judge? To turn away? Put something in your stomach. Take a drink. Play a game. Don't weep for your dead. Just skip it, think about something else."

"I'm afraid the boy's alone," the Judge said gently, "but it's only for the night." His voice was melodious. "Can't be sheltered from grief when it comes. None of us can."

"Excuse me, sir, but I wish he *would* grieve. I wish he would bawl his heart out. Wash out that black hate. I ought to go home. None of my concern. It's a woman's job." He moved and his hand went toward the phone. "He has a teacher. I can't help feeling concerned, sir. May I try?"

The Judge said, "Of course, Mike," and he put his brittle old bones into a chair.

Mike Russell pried the number out of the Board of Education. "Miss Lillian Dana? My name is Russell. You know a boy named Freddy Titus?"

"Oh, yes. He's in my class." The voice was pleasing.

"Miss Dana, there is trouble. You know Judge Kittinger's house? Could you come there?"

"What is the trouble?"

"Freddy's little dog is dead of poison. I'm afraid Freddy is in a bad state. There is no one to help him. His folks are away. The woman taking care of him," Mike's careful explanatory sentences burst into indignation, "has no more sympathetic imagination than a broken clothes-pole." He heard a little gasp. "I'd like to help him, Miss Dana, but I'm a man and

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a stranger, and the Judge . . ." He paused.

". . . is old," said the Judge in his chair.

"I'm terribly sorry," the voice on the phone said slowly. "Freddy's a wonderful boy."

"You are his friend?"

"Yes, we are friends."

"Then, could you come? You see, we've got to get a terrible idea out of his head. He thinks a man across the street poisoned his dog on purpose. Miss Dana, *he has no doubt!* And he doesn't cry." She gasped again. "Greenwood Lane," he said, "and Hannibal Street — the southeast corner."

She said, "I'll come. I have a car. I'll come as soon as I can."

Russell turned and caught the Judge biting his lips. "Am I making too much of this, sir?" he inquired humbly.

"I don't like the boy's stubborn conviction." The Judge's voice was dry and clear. "Any more than you do. I agree that he must be brought to understand. But . . ." the old man shifted in the chair. "Of course, the man, Matlin, is a fool, Mike. There is something solemn and silly about him that makes him fair game. He's unfortunate. He married a widow with a crippled child, and no sooner were they married than *she* collapsed. And he's not well off. He's encumbered with that enormous house."

"What does he do, sir?"

"He's a photographer. Oh, he struggles, tries his best, and all that. But with such tension, Mike. That poor misshapen girl over there tries to keep the house, devoted to her mother. Matlin works hard, is devoted, too. And yet the sum comes out in petty strife, nerves, quarrels, uproar. And certainly it cannot be necessary to feud with children."

"The kids have done their share of that, I'll bet," mused Mike. "The kids are delighted — a neighborhood ogre, to add the fine flavor of menace. A focus for mischief. An enemy."

"True enough." The Judge sighed. "So the myth is made. No rumor about ole Matlin loses anything in the telling. I can see it's been built up. You don't knock it down in a day."

"No," said the Judge uneasily. He got up from the chair.

The young man rubbed his dark head. "I don't like it, sir. We don't know what's in the kids' minds, or who their heroes are. There is only the gang. What do you suppose it advises?"

"What could it advise, after all?" said the Judge crisply. "This isn't the slums, whatever Matlin says." He went nervously to the window. He fiddled with the shade pull. He said, suddenly, "From my little summer house in the backyard you can overhear the gang. They congregate under that oak. Go and eavesdrop, Mike."

The young man snapped to attention. "Yes, sir."

"I . . . think we had better know," said the Judge, a trifle sheepishly.

The kids sat under the oak, in a grassy hollow. Freddy was the core.

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His face was tight. His eyes never left off watching the house of the enemy. The others watched him, or hung their heads, or watched their own brown hands play with the grass.

They were not chattering. There hung about them a heavy, sullen silence, heavy with a sense of tragedy, sullen with a sense of wrong, and from time to time one voice or another would fling out a pronouncement, which would sink into the silence, thickening its ugliness . . .

The Judge looked up from his paper. "Could you . . . ?"

"I could hear," said Mike in a quiet voice. "They are condemning the law, sir. They call it corrupt. They are quite certain that Matlin killed the dog. They see themselves as Robin Hoods, vigilantes, defending the weak, the wronged, the dog. They think they are discussing justice. They are waiting for dark. They speak of weapons, sir — the only ones they have. B.B. guns, after dark."

"Great heavens!"

"Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stop it."

Mrs. Somers was cooking supper when he tapped on the screen. "Oh, it's you. What do you want?"

"I want your help, Mrs. Somers. For Freddy."

"Freddy," she interrupted loudly, with her nose high, "is going to have his supper and go to bed his regular time, and that's all about Freddy. Now, what did you want?"

He said, "I want you to let me take the boy to my apartment for the night."

"I couldn't do that!" She was scandalized.

"The Judge will vouch . . ."

"Now, see here, Mr. what's your name — Russell. This isn't my house and Freddy's not my boy. I'm responsible to Mr. and Mrs. Titus. You're a stranger to me. As far as I can see, Freddy is no business of yours whatsoever."

"Which is his room?" asked Mike sharply.

"Why do you want to know?" She was hostile and suspicious.

"Where does he keep his B.B. gun?"

She was startled to an answer. "In the shed out back. Why?"

He told her.

"Kid's talk," she scoffed. "You don't know much about kids, do you, young man? Freddy will go to sleep. First thing he'll know, it's morning. That's about the size of it."

"You may be right. I hope so."

Mrs. Somers slapped potatoes into the pan. Her lips quivered indignantly. She felt annoyed because she was a little shaken. The strange young man really had hoped so.

Russell scanned the street, went across to Matlin's house. The man himself answered the bell. The air in this house was stale, and bore the faint smell of old grease. There was

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over everything an atmosphere of struggle and despair. Many things ought to have been repaired and had not been repaired. The place was too big. There wasn't enough money, or strength. It was too much.

Mrs. Matlin could not walk. Otherwise, one saw, she struggled and did the best she could. She had a lost look, as if some anxiety, ever present, took about nine-tenths of her attention. May Matlin limped in and sat down, lumpishly.

Russell began earnestly, "Mr. Matlin, I don't know how this situation between you and the boys began. I can guess that the kids are much to blame. I imagine they enjoy it." He smiled. He wanted to be sympathetic towards this man.

"Of course they enjoy it." Matlin looked triumphant.

"They call me The Witch," the girl said. "Pretend they're scared of me. The devils. I'm scared of them."

Matlin flicked a nervous eye at the woman in the wheelchair. "The truth is, Mr. Russell," he said in his high whine, "they're vicious."

"It's too bad," said his wife in a low voice. "I think it's dangerous."

"Mama, you mustn't worry," said the girl in an entirely new tone. "I won't let them hurt you. Nobody will hurt you."

"Be quiet, May," said Matlin. "You'll upset her. Of course nobody will hurt her."

"Yes, it is dangerous, Mrs. Matlin," said Russell quietly. "That's why I came over."

Matlin goggled. "What? What's this?"

"Could I possibly persuade you, sir, to spend the night away from this neighborhood . . . and depart noisily?"

"No," said Matlin, raring up, his ego bristling, "no, you cannot! I will under no circumstances be driven away from my own home." His voice rose. "Furthermore, I certainly will not leave my wife and step-daughter."

"We could manage, dear," said Mrs. Matlin anxiously.

Russell told them about the talk under the oak, the B.B. gun.

"Devils," said May Matlin, "absolutely . . ."

"Oh, Earl," trembled Mrs. Matlin, "maybe we had all better go away."

Matlin, red-necked, furious, said, "We own this property. We pay our taxes. We have our rights. Let them! Let them try something like that! Then, I think the law would have something to say. This is outrageous! I did not harm that animal. Therefore, I defy . . ." He looked solemn and silly, as the Judge had said, with his face crimson, his weak eyes rolling.

Russell rose. "I thought I ought to make the suggestion," he said mildly, "because it would be the safest thing to do. But don't worry, Mrs. Matlin, because I . . ."

"A B.B. gun can blind . . ." she said tensely.

"Or even worse," Mike agreed. "But I am thinking of the . . ."

"Just a minute," Matlin roared. "You can't come in here and terrify

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my wife! She is not strong. You have no right." He drew himself up with his feet at a right angle, his pudgy arm extended, his plump jowls quivering. "Get out," he cried. He looked ridiculous.

Whether the young man and the bewildered woman in the chair might have understood each other was not to be known. Russell, of course, got out. May Matlin hobbled to the door and as Russell went through it, she said, "Well, you warned us, anyhow." And her lips came together, sharply.

Russell plodded across the pavement again. Long enchanting shadows from the lowering sun struck aslant through the golden air and all the old houses were gilded and softened in their green setting. He moved toward the big oak. He hunkered down. The sun struck its golden shafts deep under the boughs. "How's it going?" he asked.

Freddy Titus looked frozen and still. "O.K.," said Phil Bourchard with elaborate ease. Light on his owlish glasses hid the eyes.

Mike opened his lips, hesitated. Supper time struck on the neighborhood clock. Calls, like chimes, were sounding.

". . . 's my Mom," said Ernie Allen. "See you after."

"See you after, Freddy."

"O.K."

"O.K."

Mrs. Somers' hoot had chimed with the rest and now Freddy got up, stiffly.

"O.K.?" said Mike Russell. The useful syllables that take any meaning at all in American mouths asked, "Are you feeling less bitter, boy? Are you any easier?"

"O.K.," said Freddy. The same syllables shut the man out.

Mike opened his lips. Closed them. Freddy went across the lawn to his kitchen door. There was a brown crockery bowl on the back stoop. His sneaker, rigid on the ankle, stepped over it. Mike Russell watched, and then, with a movement of his arms, almost as if he would wring his hands, he went up the Judge's steps.

"Well?" The Judge opened his door. "Did you talk to the boy?"

Russell didn't answer. He sat down.

The Judge stood over him. "The boy . . . The enormity of this whole idea *must* be explained to him."

"I can't explain," Mike said. "I open my mouth. Nothing comes out."

"Perhaps *I* had better . . ."

"What are you going to say, sir?"

"Why, give him the facts," the Judge cried.

"The facts are . . . the dog is dead."

"There are no facts that point to Matlin."

"There are no facts that point to a tramp, either. That's too sloppy, sir."

"What are you driving at?"

"Judge, the boy is more rightfully suspicious than we are."

"Nonsense," said the Judge. "The girl saw the dog's body before Matlin came . . ."

"There is no alibi for poison," Mike said sadly.

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"Are you saying the man is a liar?"

"Liars," sighed Mike. "Truth and lies. How are those kids going to understand, sir? To that Mrs. Page, to the lot of them, Truth is only a subjective intention. 'I am no liar,' sez she, sez he. 'I *intend* to be truthful. So do not insult me.' Lord, when will we begin? It's what we were talking about at lunch, sir. What you and I believe. What the race has been told and told in such agony, in a million years of bitter lesson. *Error*, we were saying. Error is the enemy."

He flung out of the chair. "We know that to tell the truth is not merely a good intention. It's a damned difficult thing to do. It's a skill, to be practiced. It's a technique. It's an effort. It takes brains. It takes watching. It takes humility and self-examination. It's a science and an art . . .

"Why don't we tell the *kids* these things? Why is everyone locked up in anger, shouting liar at the other side? Why don't they automatically know how easy it is to be, not wicked, but mistaken? Why is there this notion of violence? Because Freddy doesn't think to himself, 'Wait a minute. I might be wrong.' The habit isn't there. Instead, there are the heroes — the big-muscled, noble-hearted, gun-toting heroes, blind in a righteousness totally arranged by the author. Excuse me, sir."

"All that may be," said the Judge grimly, "and I agree. But the police know the lesson. They . . ."

"They don't care."

"What?"

"Don't care enough, sir. None of us cares enough — about the dog."

"I see," said the Judge. "Yes, I see. We haven't the least idea what happened to the dog." He touched his pince-nez.

Mike rubbed his head wearily. "Don't know what to do except sit under his window the night through. Hardly seems good enough."

The Judge said, simply, "Why don't you find out what happened to the dog?"

The young man's face changed. "What we need, sir," said Mike slowly, "is to teach Freddy how to ask for it. Just to ask for it. Just to want it." The old man and the young man looked at each other. Past and future telescoped. "*Now*," Mike said. "Before dark."

Supper time, for the kids, was only twenty minutes long. When the girl in the brown dress with the bare blonde head got out of the shabby coupé, the gang was gathered again in its hollow under the oak. She went to them and sank down on the ground. "Ah, Freddy, was it Bones? Your dear little dog you wrote about in the essay?"

"Yes, Miss Dana." Freddy's voice was shrill and hostile. *I won't be touched!* it cried to her. So she said no more, but sat there on the ground, and presently she began to cry. There was contagion. The simplest thing in the world. First, one of the smaller ones, whimpering. Finally, Freddy Titus, bending over. Her arm guided

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his head, and then he lay weeping in her lap.

Russell, up in the summer house, closed his eyes and praised the Lord. In a little while he swung his legs over the railing and slid down the bank. "How do? I'm Mike Russell."

"I'm Lillian Dana." She was quick and intelligent, and her tears were real.

"Fellows," said Mike briskly, "you know what's got to be done, don't you? We've got to solve this case."

They turned their woeful faces.

He said, deliberately, "It's just the same as a murder. It is a murder."

"Yeah," said Freddy and sat up, tears drying. "And it was ole Matlin."

"Then we have to prove it."

Miss Lillian Dana saw the boy's face lock. He didn't need to prove anything, the look proclaimed. He knew. She leaned over a little and said, "But we can't make an ugly mistake and put it on Bones's account. Bones was a fine dog. Oh, that would be a terrible monument." Freddy's eyes turned, startled.

"It's up to us," said Mike gratefully, "to go after the real facts, with real detective work. For Bones's sake."

"It's the least we can do for him," said Miss Dana, calmly and decisively.

Freddy's face lifted.

"Trouble is," Russell went on quickly, "people get things wrong. Sometimes they don't remember straight. They make mistakes."

"Ole Matlin tells lies," said Freddy.

"If he does," said Russell cheerfully, "then we've got to *prove* that he does. Now, I've figured out a plan, if Miss Dana will help us. You pick a couple of the fellows, Fred. Have to go to all the houses around and ask some questions. Better pick the smartest ones. To find out the truth is very hard," he challenged.

"And then?" said Miss Dana in a fluttery voice.

"Then they, and you, if you will . . ."

"Me?" She straightened. "I am a schoolteacher, Mr. Russell. Won't the police . . . ?"

"Not before dark."

"What are *you* going to be doing?"

"Dirtier work."

She bit her lip. "It's nosey. It's . . . not done."

"No," he agreed. "You may lose your job."

She wasn't a bad-looking young woman. Her eyes were fine. Her brow was serious, but there was the ghost of a dimple in her cheek. Her hands moved. "Oh, well, I can always take up beauty culture or something. What are the questions?" She had a pad of paper and a pencil half out of her purse, and looked alert and efficient.

Now, as the gang huddled, there was a warm sense of conspiracy growing. "Going to be the dickens of a job," Russell warned them. And he outlined some questions. "Now, don't let anybody fool you into taking a sloppy answer," he concluded. "Ask how they know. Get real evidence. But don't go to Matlin's — I'll go there."

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"I'm not afraid of him." Freddy's nostrils flared.

"I think I stand a better chance of getting the answers," said Russell coolly. "Aren't we after the answers?"

Freddy swallowed. "And if it turns out . . . ?"

"It turns out the way it turns out," said Russell, rumpling the tow head. "Choose your henchmen. Tough, remember."

"Phil. Ernie." The kids who were left out wailed as the three small boys and their teacher, who wasn't a lot bigger, rose from the ground.

"It'll be tough, Mr. Russell," Miss Dana said grimly. "Whoever you are, thank you for getting me into this."

"I'm just a stranger," he said gently, looking down at her face. "But you are a friend and a teacher." Pain crossed her eyes. "You'll be teaching now, you know."

Her chin went up. "O.K. kids. I'll keep the paper and pencil. Freddy, wipe your face. Stick your shirt in, Phil. Now, let's organize . . ."

It was nearly nine o'clock when the boys and the teacher, looking rather exhausted, came back to the Judge's house. Russell, whose face was grave, reached for the papers in her hands.

"Just a minute," said Miss Dana. "Judge, we have some questions."

Ernie Allen bared all his heap of teeth and stepped forward. "Did you see Bones today?" he asked with the firm skill of repetition. The Judge nodded. "How many times and when?"

"Once. Er . . . shortly before noon. He crossed my yard, going east."

The boys bent over the pad. Then Freddy's lips opened hard. "How do you know the time, Judge Kittinger?"

"Well," said the Judge, "hm . . . let me think. I was looking out the window for my company and just then he arrived."

"Five minutes of one, sir," Mike said.

Freddy flashed around. "What makes you sure?"

"I looked at my watch," said Russell. "I was taught to be exactly five minutes early when I'm asked to a meal." There was a nodding among the boys, and Miss Dana wrote on the pad.

"Then I was mistaken," said the Judge, thoughtfully. "It was shortly before one. Of course."

Phil Bourchard took over. "Did you see anyone go into Matlin's driveway or back lot?"

"I did not."

"Were you out of doors or did you look up that way?"

"Yes, I . . . When we left the table. Mike?"

"At two-thirty, sir."

"How do you know that time for sure?" asked Freddy Titus.

"Because I wondered if I could politely stay a little longer." Russell's eyes congratulated Miss Lillian Dana. She had made them a team, and on it, Freddy was the How-do-you-know-for-sure Department.

"Can you swear," continued Phil to the Judge, "there was nobody

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at all around Matlin's back lot then?"

"As far as my view goes," answered the Judge cautiously.

Freddy said promptly, "He couldn't see much. Too many trees. We can't count that."

They looked at Miss Dana and she marked on the pad. "Thank you. Now, you have a cook, sir? We must question her."

"This way," said the Judge, rising and bowing.

Russell looked after them and his eyes were velvet again. He met the Judge's twinkle. Then he sat down and ran an eye quickly over some of the sheets of paper, passing each on to his host.

Startled, he looked up. Lillian Dana, standing in the door, was watching his face.

"Do you think, Mike . . . ?"

A paper drooped in the Judge's hand.

"We can't stop," she challenged.

Russell nodded, and turned to the Judge. "May need some high brass, sir." The Judge rose. "And tell me, sir, where Matlin plays golf. And the telephone number of the Salvage League. No, Miss Dana, we can't stop. We'll take it where it turns."

"We must," she said.

It was nearly ten when the neighbors began to come in. The Judge greeted them soberly. The Chief of Police arrived. Mrs. Somers, looking grim and uprooted in a crêpe dress, came. Mr. Matlin, Mrs. Page, Mr. and Mrs. Daugherty, a Mr. and Mrs. Baker, and Diane Bourchard, who was sixteen. They looked curiously at the tight little group, the boys and their blonde teacher.

Last of all to arrive was young Mr. Russell, who slipped in from the dark veranda, accepted the Judge's nod, and called the meeting to order.

"We have been investigating the strange death of a dog," he began. "Chief Anderson, while we know your department would have done so in good time, we also know you are busy, and some of us," he glanced at the dark window pane, "couldn't wait. Will you help us now?"

The Chief said, genially, "That's why I'm here, I guess." It was the Judge and his stature that gave this meeting any standing. Naïve, young, a little absurd it might have seemed had not the old man sat so quietly attentive among them.

"Thank you, sir. Now, all we want to know is what happened to the dog." Russell looked about him. "First, let us demolish the tramp." Mrs. Page's feathers ruffled. Russell smiled at her. "Mrs. Page saw a man go down Matlin's drive this morning. The Salvage League sent a truck to pick up rags and papers which at ten forty-two was parked in front of the Daughertys'. The man, who seemed poorly dressed in his working clothes, went to the tool room behind Matlin's garage, as he had been instructed to. He picked up a bundle and returned to his truck. Mrs. Page," purred Mike to her scarlet face, "the man was there. It was only your opinion about

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him that proves to have been, not a lie, but an error."

He turned his head. "Now, we have tried to trace the dog's day and we have done remarkably well, too." As he traced it for them, some faces began to wear at least the ghost of a smile, seeing the little dog frisking through the neighborhood. "Just before one," Mike went on, "Bones ran across the Judge's yard to the Allens' where the kids were playing ball. Up to this time no one saw Bones *above* Greenwood Lane or *up* Hannibal Street. But Miss Diane Bourchard, recovering from a sore throat, was not in school today. After lunch, she sat on her porch directly across from Mr. Matlin's back lot. She was waiting for school to be out, when she expected her friends to come by.

"She saw, not Bones, but Corky, an animal belonging to Mr. Daugherty, playing in Matlin's lot at about two o'clock. I want your opinion. If poisoned bait had been lying there at two, would Corky have found it?"

"Seems so," said Daugherty. "Thank God Corky didn't." He bit his tongue. "Corky's a show dog," he blundered.

"But Bones," said Russell gently, "was more like a friend. That's why we care, of course."

"It's a damned shame!" Daugherty looked around angrily.

"It is," said Mrs. Baker. "He was a friend of mine, Bones was."

"Go on," growled Daugherty, "What else did you dig up?"

"Mr. Matlin left for his golf at eleven thirty. Now, you see, it looks as if Matlin couldn't have left poison behind him."

"I most certainly did not," snapped Matlin. "I have said so. I will not stand for this sort of innuendo. I am not a liar. You said it was a conference . . ."

Mike held the man's eye. "We are simply trying to find out what happened to the dog," he said. Matlin fell silent.

"Surely you realize," purred Mike, "that, human frailty being what it is, there may have been other errors in what we were told this afternoon. There was at least one more.

"Mr. and Mrs. Baker," he continued, "worked in their garden this afternoon. Bones abandoned the ball game to visit the Bakers' dog, Smitty. At three o'clock, the Bakers, after discussing the time carefully, lest it be too late in the day, decided to bathe Smitty. When they caught him, for his ordeal, Bones was still there. . . . So, you see, Miss May Matlin, who says she saw Bones lying by the sidewalk *before three o'clock*, was mistaken."

Matlin twitched. Russell said sharply, "The testimony of the Bakers is extremely clear." The Bakers, who looked alike, both brown outdoor people, nodded vigorously.

"The time at which Mr. Matlin returned is quite well established. Diane saw him. Mrs. Daugherty, next door, decided to take a nap, at five after three. She had a roast to

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put in at four thirty. Therefore, she is sure of the time. She went upstairs and from an upper window, she, too, saw Mr. Matlin come home. Both witnesses say he drove his car into the garage at three ten, got out, and went around the building to the right of it — *on the weedy side.*"

Mr. Matlin was sweating. His forehead was beaded. He did not speak.

Mike shifted papers. "Now, we know that the kids trooped up to Phil Bourchard's kitchen at about a quarter of three. Whereas Bones, realizing that Smitty was in for it, and shying away from soap and water like any sane dog, went up Hannibal Street at three o'clock sharp. He may have known in some doggy way where Freddy was. Can we see Bones loping up Hannibal Street, going *above* Greenwood Lane?"

"We can," said Daugherty. He was watching Matlin. "Besides, he was found above Greenwood Lane soon after."

"No one," said Mike slowly, "was seen in Matlin's back lot, except Matlin. Yet, almost immediately after Matlin was there, the little dog died."

"Didn't Diane . . . ?"

"Diane's friends came at three-twelve. Their evidence is not reliable." Diane blushed.

"This . . . this is intolerable!" croaked Matlin. "Why *my* back lot?"

Daugherty said, "There was no poison lying around my place, I'll tell you that."

"How do you know?" begged Matlin. And Freddy's eyes, with the smudges under them, followed to Russell's face. "Why not in the street? From some passing car?"

Mike said, "I'm afraid it's not likely. You see, Mr. Otis Carnavon was stalled at the corner of Hannibal and Lee. Trying to flag a push. Anything thrown from a car on that block, he ought to have seen."

"Was the poison quick?" demanded Daugherty. "What did he get?"

"It was quick. The dog could not go far after he got it. He got cyanide."

Matlin's shaking hand removed his glasses. They were wet.

"Some of you may be amateur photographers," Mike said. "Mr. Matlin, is there cyanide in your cellar darkroom?"

"Yes, but I keep it . . . most meticulously . . ." Matlin began to cough.

When the noise of his spasm died, Mike said, "The poison was embedded in ground meat which analyzed, roughly, half-beef and the rest pork and veal, half and half." Matlin encircled his throat with his fingers. "I've checked with four neighborhood butchers and the dickens of a time I had," said Mike. No one smiled. Only Freddy looked up at him with solemn sympathy. "Ground meat was delivered to at least five houses in the vicinity. Meat that *was* one-half beef, one-quarter pork, one-quarter veal, was delivered at ten this morning to Matlin's house."

A stir like an angry wind blew over the room. The Chief of Police

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made some shift of his weight so that his chair creaked.

"It begins to look . . ." growled Daugherty.

"Now," said Russell sharply, "we must be very careful. One more thing. The meat had been seasoned."

"Seasoned!"

"With salt. And with . . . thyme."

"Thyme," groaned Matlin.

Freddy looked up at Miss Dana with bewildered eyes. She put her arm around him.

"As far as motives are concerned," said Mike quietly, "I can't discuss them. It is inconceivable to me that any man would poison a dog." Nobody spoke. "However, where are we?" Mike's voice seemed to catch Matlin just in time to keep him from falling off the chair. "We don't know yet what happened to the dog." Mike's voice rang. "Mr. Matlin, will you help us to the answer?"

Matlin said thickly, "Better get those kids out of here."

Miss Dana moved, but Russell said, "No. They have worked hard for the truth. They have earned it. And if it is to be had, they shall have it."

"You know?" whimpered Matlin.

Mike said, "I called your golf club. I've looked into your trash incinerator. Yes, I know. But I want you to tell us."

Daugherty said, "Well? Well?" And Matlin covered his face.

Mike said, gently, "I think there was an error. Mr. Matlin, I'm afraid, did poison the dog. But he never meant to, and he didn't know he had done it."

Matlin said, "I'm sorry . . . It's . . . I can't . . . She means to do her best. But she's a terrible cook. Somebody gave her those . . . those herbs. Thyme . . . thyme in everything. She fixed me a lunch box. I . . . couldn't stomach it. I bought my lunch at the club."

Mike nodded.

Matlin went on, his voice cracking. "I never . . . You see, I didn't even know it was meat the dog got. She said . . . she told me the dog was already dead."

"And of course," said Mike, "in your righteous wrath, you never paused to say to yourself, 'Wait, what *did* happen to the dog?' "

"Mr. Russell, I didn't lie. How could I know there was thyme in it? When I got home, I had to get rid of the hamburger she'd fixed for me — I didn't want to hurt her feelings. She tries . . . tries so hard . . ." He sat up suddenly. "*But what she tried to do today*," he said, with his eyes almost out of his head, "*was to poison me!*" His bulging eyes roved. They came to Freddy. He gasped. He said, "Your dog saved my life!"

"Yes," said Mike quickly, "Freddy's dog saved your life. You see, your step-daughter would have kept trying."

People drew in their breaths. "The buns are in your incinerator," Mike said. "She guessed what happened to the dog, went for the buns, and hid them. She was late, you remem-

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ber, getting to the disturbance. And she did lie."

Chief Anderson rose.

"Her mother . . ." said Matlin frantically, "her mother . . ."

Mike Russell put his hand on the plump shoulder. "Her mother's been in torment, tortured by the rivalry between you. Don't you think her mother senses something wrong?"

Miss Lillian Dana wrapped Freddy in her arms. "Oh, what a wonderful dog Bones was!" She covered the sound of the other voices. "Even when he died, he saved a man's life. Oh, Freddy, he was a wonderful dog."

And Freddy, not quite taking everything in yet, was released to simple sorrow and wept quietly against his friend . . .

When they went to fetch May Matlin, she was not in the house. They found her in the Titus's back shed. She seemed to be looking for something.

Next day, when Mr. and Mrs. Titus came home, they found that although the little dog had died, their Freddy was all right. The Judge, Russell, and Miss Dana told them all about it.

Mrs. Titus wept. Mr. Titus swore. He wrung Russell's hand. ". . . for stealing the gun . . ." he babbled.

But the mother cried, ". . . for showing him, for teaching him. . . . Oh, Miss Dana, oh, my dear!"

The Judge waved from his veranda as the dark head and the blonde drove away.

"I think Miss Dana likes him," said Ernie Allen.

"How do you know for sure?" said Freddy Titus.

The message in Charlotte Armstrong's story is worth thinking over, worth your most earnest pondering. Mike Russell asked: What do they teach the kids these days? To turn away? Not to weep for the dead? To skip it? To think of something else? Not to seek the truth? But if we make our children realize how hard it is to discover the truth — that, in Mike Russell's words, to find the truth is a skill, a technique, that it takes brains, watching, humility, and self-examination — if we plant, nourish, cultivate that precious seed in our children's minds, then the world will soon be a far different world, and a better one.

Again, as in the past one hundred and ten years, the detective story points the way, teaches the lesson we must all learn in order to achieve peace on earth, good will toward man. Truth is justice, tolerance, and understanding — by the people, for the people, of the people — regardless of race, color, or creed. That, and that alone, is the secret of a United World — the hope, and the only hope, for a better tomorrow . . .

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It took us nearly ten years to discover that Rafael Sabatini, one of the most famous historical novelists of our time, author of THE SEA-HAWK, SCARAMOUCHE, *and the unforgettable* CAPTAIN BLOOD, *wrote a series of detective-crime short stories with historical backgrounds. These "turbulent tales" — of "scoundrel violence," of deception, trickery, swindling, blackmail, treason, robbery, assault, bribery, and murder — offer not only a "compleat calendar of crime," but also the "compleat criminal." You will make the acquaintance, authentically costumed and ornamented, of as rich and redolent a collection of rogues as have ever practised their rascalities down through the ages. And each tale is plotted around an [apocryphal] incident in the life of such well-known figures in history as Michaelangelo, Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys (The Hanging Judge), and Casanova.*

We plan to bring you at least six of these swashbuckling tales of "villainy unmask'd." The first three concern Count Alessandro Cagliostro, the 18th Century alchemist, who did an astonishing business in elixirs of youth, love-philtres, magical concoctions which transformed the ugliest ducklings into court beauties, and all manner of cure-alls and panaceas — to say nothing of being able to manufacture diamonds and rubies and 24-carat gold ingots at will, in any size or quantity . . .

THE LORD OF TIME

by RAFAEL SABATINI

It was Cagliostro's queer arresting gesture before the crucifix in the great square that supplied the decisive spur to the wishes of the Cardinal-Prince Louis de Rohan.

From the moment of his entrance into Strasbourg, in his gilded rococo coach, drawn by six cream-coloured ponies, Count Cagliostro had been the focus of attention in the town, even before he had afforded evidence of his miraculous powers.

Without fee or guerdon he cured diseases which ordinary doctors had pronounced beyond human relief. As a result, and very soon, the house in which he lodged was besieged from early morning to late evening by the crowds that thronged to implore his aid or to gratify in some degree the extraordinary curiosity he excited. The fame of him ran, like a ripple over water, through Alsace. His power to expel disease was accounted superhuman and was almost the least of the superhuman attributes discovered

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in him. He was credited with possessing the secret of the fixation of mercury and the transmutation of metals; precious stones composed themselves under his hands from the commonest elements; he could restore youth to the aged, and he was actually master of an elixir of life itself; he possessed gifts of prophecy and clairvoyance, and he could read thoughts as easily as another might detect the signs of emotion on a countenance; to such extraordinary lengths did he carry the art with which Mesmer had lately astonished the world that he was said to have the power of controlling the very souls of men, and that he rendered manifest how far was Mesmer from understanding the application of those forces upon the wells of which he had more or less accidentally blundered. In short, this Count Cagliostro, coming no man knew whence, was being pronounced divine.

That great aristocrat, that noble Maecenas, the Cardinal-Prince de Rohan, who was more royal than the King, for in his veins ran the blood of every house that had ever given kings to France, heard of these marvels, and was moved to desire a nearer acquaintance with them. All his life a passionate student of alchemy, botany, astrology and the occult in general, the Cardinal brought to the study of the supernatural the open-mindedness of a credulous person. It seemed to him that if Cagliostro were indeed sincere, and not merely a charlatan, like so many in France just then, he might bring to real fruition pursuits which His Eminence had hitherto found vexatiously elusive in results. And then came the report of those queer words in the square to quicken this desire.

Count Cagliostro had gone forth one evening to take the air, followed at a respectful distance by his servant, the slight, dark, pallid fellow who bore the curious name of Abdon. The Count's appearance was that of a man in the prime of life, between thirty and forty. Of middle height, his frame was thick-set and vigorous, and he carried his big coarsely handsome head with an air of majesty on his powerful neck. He was dressed with an ostentation that in itself took the eye. His blue silk coat was laced in gold along the seams, with the sword worn through the pocket; his red-heeled shoes were fastened with buckles of precious stones; brilliants flashed in the billows of lace at his throat; rubies attached his solitaire and glowed in the buckle that held the white plumes in his hat *à la mousquetaire*. It has been testified by practically all who knew him, and who have left records, that few could support the direct gaze of his full, bold, dark, uncanny eyes.

As he walked, men turned to observe and to follow him, until an inquisitive crowd had formed at a respectful distance in his wake. This was customary. Just as it was customary for him, aloof and absorbed, to appear unconscious of the attention he was attracting.

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And then at last he came to pause before the Crucifix in its open shrine. Leaning upon the jewelled head of his ebony cane, he stood for some moments in thoughtful, wistful contemplation.

"Strange, Abdon," he said at last, over his shoulder, to his servant, "that one who can never have seen Him should so faithfully reproduce His lineaments." There was an implication here that sent a thrill of awe through the attendant, but respectfully silent, crowd. Then, after a long pause, Cagliostro sighed and spoke again. "Do you remember that evening in Jerusalem when they crucified Him?"

The spectators caught their breath, then held it so as not to miss the answer. Abdon, bowing low with something of the Orient in his manner, replied quietly but distinctly: "You forget, Master, that I have been with you only fifteen hundred years."

"Ah, true," said the Count. "I was forgetting. But with so many centuries to remember . . ." He left the sentence there, shrugged, and sauntered on.

A report of this left the Cardinal-Prince wondering whether this man of marvels was indeed divine or merely the most impudent charlatan that had ever walked the earth. His Eminence, considering it incumbent upon him to resolve the question, sent a gentleman of his following, the Baron de Planta, to command Cagliostro to wait upon him at the Château de Saverne, where his Eminence had his seat.

Cagliostro's reception of the command reflected his lofty disdain of the mighty of this world.

"If the Cardinal is ill let him come to me, and I will cure him. If he is well he has no need of me, nor I of him."

That anyone should send such a message to the Cardinal-Prince implied to the Baron de Planta that the end of the world was at hand. And this was confirmed by the manner in which the matchlessly urbane and gracious Cardinal received it.

"Sublime reply, whatever the man may be," was his liberal opinion.

Louis de Rohan was approaching fifty at the time, but his tall figure still preserved the grace of youth as did his countenance, which, reflecting his mind, was handsome in a rather infantile way; it was so smooth of contours, and so free from lines, that his ashen hair seemed prematurely faded.

Accustomed from earliest youth to sycophancy, the proud independence of Count Cagliostro drew this great prince, temporal and spiritual, to seek the man of marvels at his lodging in Strasbourg, like the humblest suitor. There, attended only by de Planta, he waited without resentment in the thronged ante-chamber to take his turn, as was imposed by one who made a parade of awarding no precedence to rank.

What reservations the Cardinal's ingenuous mind still harboured on

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the subject of Count Cagliostro's claims were dispelled almost as soon as he came to stand in the Count's presence. Under the hypnotic gaze of the man's singular eyes, dark and lustrous and of a penetration that seemed unearthly, His Eminence experienced such a sense of awe that his own glance fell abashed. But when he had accepted the proffered chair a mild resentment stirred in him that he, who had borne as an equal the gaze of kings, should have suffered himself so easily to be stared down. Determinedly he raised his eyes again, and compelled himself to meet and hold the other's glance. Soon, however, whilst Cagliostro, who remained standing before him, talked in a deep vibrant voice and in a language that was only just perceptibly French, the Cardinal became aware that it was not himself but the Count who was exercising this compulsion: that it was his own glance that was being held, and that he was powerless to withdraw it from those glittering orbs that seemed presently to wax and wane as he watched them in a helpless fascination. Rohan began to be pervaded by a sense of his own unreality; it was as if all power of will and of self-assertion had gone out of him. His senses were being further lulled into subjection by the rise and fall in rhythmical hypnotic cadences of the voice addressing him in that curious Italianate French.

"Now that I behold you I perceive the source of your persistence, Monseigneur. We have met before."

To this the bewildered Cardinal, after a faltering search in his memory, made answer: "I don't remember."

"How should you? Between this and that stand for you the walls of a dozen deaths, a dozen re-births. The soul-memory deep within you is choked and smothered by the ponderous strata of all the flesh it has since worn, with the lusts, the passions, the sins and aspirations that belong to each. It was sixteen centuries ago in Antioch. You were a Roman proconsul, and I was, *mutatis mutandis*, much as I am now, a wanderer upon the face of the earth, a traveller down the ages."

Even in the befogged state of his senses this was more than His Eminence could be expected to digest. Indeed, indignation at the impudent affront to his intelligence aroused combativeness.

"You will have evidence of this?" he said, in quiet mockery.

"Evidence!" boomed the sonorous voice. "What is evidence? The thing seen. And what shall be seen of the eternal verities by poor human vision, as narrowly restricted to the immediate environment as is that of the blind earthworm to the soil in which it burrows? Can the earthworm see the stars? How, then, help him if he asks for evidence of their existence? And how help man if he asks for evidence of what lies beyond them?"

Despite himself the Cardinal must admit that there was theological authority for these implications.

"And yet," the mystagogue con-

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tinued, "since you ask for it, some evidence I shall hope to give you before all is said. So condescend to hear me out.

"You were drawn to me in those far-off days as you are drawn now, which is to say that you were inquisitive about me; inquisitive and mistrustful. Then your Roman arrogance, your Roman scepticism, obfuscated your understanding. You supposed me an impostor, a vain seducer, even as remains of arrogance and scepticism, heritage of those Roman days — a heritage which has cursed and warped your every incarnation — still afflict you now. It is so, Monseigneur. Do not interrupt me.

"In those days I was your friend. I realized the greatness latent in your soul, a soul so closely in tune with mine; and I sought to deliver it from its dull chrysalis of carnal pride, to set it free to soar in the empyrean, and from those calm altitudes to survey eternity. I would have made you lord of Life and Time, you who then, as now, were but the ephemeral lord of a fleshly envelope. I would have spread before you the Fruits of the Tree of Life and rendered you everlasting as myself. But stubborn and obstinate in your puny pride you mocked; and so I left you to your poor carnal limitations, and went my ways."

And here the Cardinal, deathly pallid, and with eyes that still stared but were now dull and vacant, contrived at last to interrupt him.

It required a supreme effort to break through the web that was being spun about his wits, to conquer a difficulty of articulation such as will trammel a man in dreams. But he conceived that he had received illumination, and at all costs he must voice it.

"I know you now," he cried. "You are the Wandering Jew, the accursed cobbler of Jerusalem who spat upon Our Lord, and is doomed to walk the earth until He comes again."

A smile swept like a shadow across the Olympian calm of Cagliostro's countenance. Sorrowfully the great, compelling eyes considered the prelate.

"How history repeats itself! So you said then, sixteen hundred years ago. When your wits were baffled by proof of my unaccountable longevity, they took refuge from the intolerable truth in the only explanation legend offered you. But you are wrong now as you were wrong then. I am not the Wandering Jew. I am older than Cartaphilus, older than Jerusalem, where I was with Solomon at the building of the Temple. And I shall survive them both. For I have eaten of the Tree of Life. My *elixir vitae* is distilled from its fruits. To me, existence is not as a string of beads; a succession of brief moments of consciousness in eternity; fleeting, uncomprehended glimpses of the world. To me, existence is a continuous stream, visible from its source to the limitless ocean of eternity into which it flows. For me, this illusion men

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call Time has no reality. For I am He Who Is."

On those last five words his vibrant, metallic voice had swelled to a trumpet-note. Thence it fell again at once to its quieter level.

"Yet that you tell me again, as you told me sixteen centuries ago in Antioch, that I am Cartaphilus, proves that I have touched in you at least a chord of that soul-memory which survives deep down in each of us. What you have remembered is what you called me once before. Let me now help your poor human weakness. Look into this mirror and endeavour to see what once you were when last I was beside you."

Leaning his elbow on the table beside the Cardinal, Cagliostro extended his left hand, which was gloved in black velvet. Cupped in the palm of it he displayed a crystal sphere something less in circumference than a tennis-ball.

So dominated by now that, in obeying, he experienced no sense of derogating, Rohan directed his gaze as he was bidden. For some moments he stared into the empty depths of the crystal. Suddenly he moved and caught his breath. He leaned forward, peering.

"I see, I see," he murmured thickly. "I see men; a multitude; an arena; a pillared marble tribune."

"Centre your gaze upon that tribune," Cagliostro commanded. "What do you find there?"

"A man of medium height and powerful frame, boldly featured, with eyes that burn their way into one's brain. He is in white; a snowy chlamys edged with gold. I know his face. Ah! It is yourself."

"And the man in the chair? Look at him: the man who sits elbow on knee and chin on fist, with a proud sad face that is wreathed in weariness and disdain. Can you name him?"

The Cardinal bent closer still; he hesitated; he was breathing heavily. "Can it be myself?"

The gloved hand closed upon the crystal and was swiftly withdrawn. Cagliostro drew himself erect, and his voice rang hard. "Yourself. Marcus Vinicius, as you then were named."

The abruptness of movement and tone seemed to shatter a spell. Rohan sat up, restored to a normal alertness. The colour crept back into his cheeks. He passed a hand, long and slim, and delicate as a woman's, across eyes and brow.

"You are master of strange secrets, sir," he said slowly and gravely. Then he added a complaint. "My senses are a little dazed, I think."

"That will pass." Cagliostro spoke harshly, and waved a hand contemptuously. "No man may look down the ages and hope to escape vertigo. It will pass. What I have discovered to you, however, remains. So that you have faith, you may now prevail where you failed before. To help you I am here; for your soul is now of a strength to bear the secrets I could impart to you, to employ the power which must never be bestowed unworthily. I am at your service, Prince

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Louis. And my coming is timely, if only so that I may restore your fortune so sadly sapped by the Prince de Guémenée."

The Cardinal was startled. "You know that?"

Again Cagliostro waved a hand. He was prodigal of gesture. "Does not all the world know it?" he asked, like a man scorning to make a mystery of the possession of knowledge reached by ordinary channels.

It was, indeed, common knowledge how much of his fortune Louis de Rohan had sacrificed to buttress the honour of his family which had been so sadly imperilled by the bankruptcy of his nephew, the Prince de Guémenée. Vast though his wealth might be, it could scarcely bear the strain of some thirty millions which that bankruptcy was imposing upon it. With deeply rooted habits of prodigal expenditure in the maintenance of his more than princely establishment, without knowledge of economy, a knowledge which his munificent spirit scorned to acquire, the Cardinal-Prince was sweeping towards the edge of financial difficulties.

He was not, however, at present concerned with this. His thoughts were consumed in the endeavour to extricate the present startling experience from the fog, as of a dream, that seemed to enshroud it.

"It is all strange," he murmured. "So very strange! Incredible! And yet something within me seems to compel belief."

"Now God be thanked that you are at last given grace to conquer the obstinacy of material scepticism. You yield at last to the instinctive knowledge of reincarnation deep in each of us: the oldest and strongest of human beliefs, persistent in spite of temporary occlusions; a belief that is at war with no creed that ever was."

"Yes, yes, that is true," the Cardinal agreed, with the eagerness of one who persuades himself. "There is no heresy in that belief. It can be reconciled. No heresy that I can perceive."

"There is none," said Cagliostro, as one speaking with full authority. "We will return to that. Meanwhile, there are Your Eminence's pressing needs." His tone blended condescension with command.

"Ah, yes." The Cardinal's will — never, it must be admitted, of the strongest — continued in suspension, a thing that veered as Cagliostro blew upon it. He smiled wanly. "My nephew's affairs are absorbing millions."

Cagliostro, erect, dominant, his great head thrown back, made a wide gesture of effacement. "Dismiss your anxieties. I have been stigmatized a magician, and persecuted as a warlock, by the ignorance of men. But, as you will come to perceive, I practise no magic that is not the natural magic of knowledge, the application of the hidden forces of nature, the fruits of study and of long centuries of experience. Among the secrets I have mastered, building upon what I

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learned in ancient Egypt from the priests of Isis, who already had glimmerings of these sciences, three are pre-eminent: the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone with its power of transmuting metals, and the gift of healing all ills to which the flesh is subject. The last I hold at the disposal of suffering mankind; the second I place at the service of those whom I can trust not to abuse the power that gold bestows; the first I guard most jealously from all save the few — the very few — who, under the most rigorous tests, give proof that the indefinite prolongation of their lives will be for the benefit of humanity.

"When I shall have relieved your most urgent need, as I so easily can, and when, thereby, I shall have increased your faith in me, we may, if you so incline, turn our attention to matters of real and abiding weight."

There was much more of the same kind before they parted on that fateful day. It followed from it that Count Cagliostro presently transferred himself from his Strasbourg lodging to be an honoured guest at the Cardinal-Prince's imposing Château de Saverne. There, by the orders of a bemused prelate at once attracted and repelled, who knew not what to believe, a laboratory was prepared for him. And there, one day, a month later, he set a crown to the empire he was obtaining over Louis de Rohan by demonstrating that his claim to transmute base metal into gold was no mountebank's boast. From the crucible set up in that laboratory he withdrew an ingot of pure gold of the value of five thousand livres, which under the Cardinal's eyes he had transmuted out of lead. He presented it to his noble host, as a mere earnest of all that was to come, with as light and casual a manner as if he were handing him a leaf plucked from a tree in passing.

For the manufacture of more, however, there were certain ingredients that Cagliostro lacked, and so as to come within reach of these he proposed to his noble patron that they should transfer themselves to Paris, to the Hôtel de Rohan.

Meanwhile, pending this removal, his apartments at the Château de Saverne were daily becoming more and more thronged by all that was noble, wealthy and fashionable in Alsace, attracted by his fame as a healer and a man of marvels, a fame which rippled thence in everwidening circles over the face of France, and set Paris itself agog in expectation of his advent.

Arrogant, domineering, impatient even, he would move through the press of distinguished suitors, his great head thrown back, his terrible, uncanny eyes at once dazzling and awing those upon whom he fixed them. Waving his short, powerful, jewelled hands in fantastic gestures, he chattered constantly in that queer, inflated jargon of his that was compounded of Italian, Italianate French and scraps of Spanish, a sort of *lingua franca* that would have been more or less understood in any coun-

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try where a Romance language was spoken. He was abrupt and harsh of speech and manner, observing few of the amenities that obtained in the polite world which now paid court to him. But as a healer his success was manifest; and not only with malingerers and hypochondriacs, but also with the genuinely afflicted. Sometimes he would display his powers of reading the secrets of a man's soul, and sometimes he would even foretell a future event.

Very soon the respect commanded for him by the aegis of the Cardinal-Prince was converted by the clear magnitude of his own arts into reverence and even worship. No enemy troubled the serenity of his days until suddenly the Prince de Guémenée, the man whose dishonest extravagances had rendered Cagliostro's services so timely to the Cardinal, came gliding like a malevolent snake into this Eden.

Monsieur de Guémenée was a hard-bitten man of the world, regarding the Hereafter with a good deal of mistrust, and of the Present accepting no more than those material parts of whose reality his senses enabled him to test the evidences. The charlatanism and quackery which in that disjointed period of transition were rampant in France moved him to contempt. That his uncle, the uncle upon whom he was depending for his existence, should be falling a prey to one of these empirics — for that was Monsieur de Guémenée's view of Count Cagliostro — aroused in him the remorseless anger that is born of selfish fear.

He descended suddenly upon the Château de Saverne with intent to disillusion the Cardinal and send the warlock packing. Armed with something besides indignation and common sense, he never doubted that he should accomplish his object.

He arrived in the dusk of a September day, and, being bidden to supper so soon as he had changed from his travelling-clothes, he must curb until afterwards his agnostic impatience.

It was not necessary that Cagliostro should be pointed out to him among the considerable company at the open table kept by the munificent Cardinal. The man's dominant air and magnetic personality made him sufficiently conspicuous. Although overdressed — his black satin coat was excessively gold-laced, and he wore with it a red waistcoat — and over-jewelled, and although his table manners left much to be desired, yet he escaped being ridiculous or even vulgar by the majestic assurance of his demeanour.

Observing the spell which the man appeared to cast upon those about him, meeting once or twice and finding himself unable to support the glance of those singularly uncanny eyes, Monsieur de Guémenée began to apprehend that the battle ahead might sternly test his strength.

Nevertheless he engaged it intrepidly with his uncle in the magnificent pillared library whither the Cardinal conducted him after supper.

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His Eminence took a seat at his ormolu-encrusted writing-table, whilst his nephew faced him from a tall arm-chair upholstered in red velvet on which was embroidered an R surmounted by a coronet.

Monsieur de Guémenée was approaching thirty. Like his uncle he was tall and slender, and he bore also in his countenance a strong resemblance to the Cardinal, but lacked the Cardinal's gentle candid air. He sat back, crossed his legs, and plunged straight into the matter.

"I have come, Monseigneur, to talk to you about this man who calls himself Count Cagliostro."

His Eminence, of imperturbable urbanity, looked mildly at his nephew.

"How should you prefer to call him, Charles?"

"An impudent impostor," was the downright answer. "A common swindler; a quacksalver whose proper place is on the Pont Neuf; a charlatan who makes a victim of Your Eminence. What his real name may be I have not yet ascertained."

The handsome Cardinal betrayed no annoyance. But there was some sorrow in his glance. "I could bear with a good grace to be such a victim as Count Cagliostro makes me. I can bear it thankfully even; and so, my dear Charles, should you, considering how much we are likely to owe to him."

"Ah! And how much is he likely to owe to you by the time he has invaded Paris, as I hear is the intention, under your exalted sponsorship; by the time you have presented him at Court and set him on the way to swindle all the people of our world?"

"You are vulgar and commonplace in your views, Charles. God commiserate me that I should discover it in a man of my own blood."

Monsieur de Guémenée leaned forward. "Monseigneur, I have been looking into this man's history."

"In that case, my dear Charles, perhaps I can add something to the information you already possess. Look at this ring." He held out a fine white hand on the middle finger of which gleamed a magnificent brilliant carved with the Rohan arms. "That is a gift from Count Cagliostro. And not only a gift, an evidence of his powers. It is a creation of his own. In the laboratory above-stairs I, myself, saw it taken from the crucible in which it was fused by him."

"Jugglery!" scoffed Monsieur de Guémenée. "Common jugglery. If he can do that, what need to live upon you?"

"He does not live upon me. Here it is he, not I, who is the benefactor. And what of the cures he daily makes upon all-comers, sometimes of maladies accounted mortal? Is that jugglery? And all is done freely, without recompense, for the love of humanity. Is that the way of an impostor, a quacksalver? And then the alms he distributes, the gold he makes. Jugglery? A stupidity of the malicious. For if he is indeed a juggler, he must be the richest juggler that ever lived. Whence does he derive his wealth?"

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His Eminence set the question with the air of a man delivering checkmate. But Monsieur de Guémenée had an answer ready.

"I can enlighten Your Eminence upon that, for I have been at pains to inform myself. He derives it from the lodges of so-called Egyptian freemasonry which he has been founding in France and elsewhere; he derives it from the sensation-seeking gulls whom he initiates into these claptrap mysteries and from whom the Grand-Copht, as he calls himself, demands rich fees for his impostures."

The Cardinal stiffened and sat bolt upright, unable, despite his deep-seated amiability, to restrain resentment.

"If you come to me merely as a retailer of vulgar scandal, of almost blasphemous calumny, I will not listen to you further."

"A moment's patience, Monseigneur. There is something else; something you may easily investigate for yourself, and not so easily dismiss. If you will condescend to hear me, I will ——"

And then the double-doors were thrown open by a lackey, who entered, ranged himself aside and announced:

"His Excellency, Count Cagliostro."

Monsieur de Guémenée sank back into his chair with a movement of petulance as the man of marvels came into view. He made a deliberate entrance, grave and masterful, from the carriage of his head to the manner in which he set his feet, and his eyes, the while, were steadily upon the Prince de Guémenée. He had seen the hasty movement and observed now the sullenness which the young man was not concerned to conceal.

As the door closed, he halted, and, maintaining that steady regard under which Monsieur de Guémenée, to his profound annoyance, began to feel uncomfortable, he spoke, subduing his resonant voice.

"If I seem to be inopportune, Monsieur de Guémenée, if I interrupt the criticisms you were about to offer, you have in this more matter for thankfulness than you may suspect."

The Cardinal smiled his satisfaction at this immediate evidence of Cagliostro's supernatural gifts of omniscience. But Monsieur de Guémenée did not choose to be impressed.

"An easy guess, sir. I trust, for the sake of the wits of those you delude, that you have more convincing tricks of clairvoyance."

His Eminence flushed with pain at this coarse insult. He would have spoken, but the mystagogue raised a hand in a gesture that imperiously commanded that the answer be left to him. He had remained standing on wide-planted feet within a yard or so of Monsieur de Guémenée, and his uncanny eyes never left the young man's face. He spoke quietly.

"There is no ground for resentment. Monsieur de Guémenée but makes himself the mouthpiece of the vulgar and of the base calumny in which the vulgar deal. Men will ever

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sneer at what they do not understand. That is why they remain fast in the slime of their brutish ignorance. Kindliness dictates that I deliver Your Eminence's nephew from the fog that envelops him to his own hurt. If Your Eminence will give me leave alone with him for a few moments I shall hope to accomplish it."

Rohan smiled. "That will be yet another miracle." He rose at once. "By all means, since you are so generously disposed, enlighten this maladroit young man. I shall be at hand, in my closet."

He moved, tall and stately, with a silken swish of his scarlet robes, to a little door that led to a small adjoining chamber which he frequently used for his studies. Monsieur de Guémenée sprang to his feet, at first purely out of deference to his uncle. But as the little door closed upon His Eminence he betrayed yet another reason for that sudden rising.

"Monsieur Cagliostro, I have no wish to hear you. I will not remain to be annoyed by your impertinences."

The Count, who had deferentially been facing the door through which His Eminence had passed, turned slowly to confront him.

"Are you afraid, Monsieur de Guémenée?"

"Afraid?"

"Of being convinced against your preconceptions, of seeing your prejudices destroyed. Look at me. Look in my face, in my eyes, sir."

The Prince looked up to meet that burning intent glance, then lowered his eyes again, his manner sullen. "Why should I do that?" he asked contemptuously.

"To conquer the difficulty that you experience in doing it."

"Difficulty? You want to laugh, I think." And in defiance, so as to prove how easily he could support those awful eyes, he stared boldly into them.

"Sit down, Monsieur de Guémenée," the Count commanded, and with a shrug Monsieur de Guémenée sank again into the tall red chair.

"Why, here's to humour you, then. But I warn you not to strain my patience." He was conscious even as he spoke that he was using jactancy as a cloak for vague discomfort, for an irritating sense that he was being dominated.

Count Cagliostro began to talk, in a low, crooning voice. "I remember once, nearly two thousand years ago, as I was walking one evening on the shore of Lake Tiberias, I met a man whose mind was as obstinately delimited as is your own to the things that may be apprehended through the bodily senses."

After that, partly because what the mystagogue said seemed gibberish, partly because of the jargon in which he delivered himself, the Prince could understand but little of what he was being told. But as he listened, consciousness vaguely grew that something was happening to him, something which inspired him with an increasing dread, yet from which he could no longer escape. The

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glare of the eyes into which he was staring had become intolerable, yet he found himself powerless to seek relief by averting his gaze. His own eyes were held as irresistibly, as inexplicably, as his very will to avert them was caught in some impalpable tentacle against which it seemed useless to struggle. The eyes into which he gazed grew in size to the dimensions of the eyes of an ox; they continued to dilate until they were great twin pools gradually merging into a single glowing pool in which he felt that presently he must plunge and drown himself. And all the while that droning voice growing more and more distant was pursuing with its unintelligible narrative, adding something to the utter subjugation of his senses. Gradually at first, then with increasing swiftness, his consciousness diminished until it was totally blotted out.

For what ensued we must follow Monsieur de Guémenée's own account as set down by him in a letter some years thereafter. He was awakened from that singular slumber into which he had lapsed by the booming of a great bell, like that of Nôtre Dame, which resolved itself as consciousness cleared into the tinkling note of the Sèvres clock on the tall overmantel. It was striking the hour of ten.

From this he knew that his lapse could only have been momentary, and as he recovered he found that the queer spell to which he had been succumbing was shattered, and he was once more entirely himself. He was still seated in the tall red chair, but Cagliostro no longer stood before him. The man of mystery had moved over to the fireplace, and was planted there now beside the clock, his shoulders to the overmantel.

Monsieur de Guémenée's first and dominant emotion was indignation, the more bitter because he could not understand the nature of the trick that had been played upon him. It was from anxiety to show that this trick, whatever it might be, had failed that he sprang to his feet and gave expression to his wrath in terms that took no account of Cagliostro's feelings.

"Miserable buffoon, do you dream that you can constrain me to remain here to listen to your lying explanations? If you do, you are as mistaken as when you suppose that I could be deceived by them. I have nothing to say to you, nothing to hear from you. My affair is with your silly dupe, His Eminence, my uncle."

Cagliostro remained impassive. "So be it, sir. I'll not detain you. I merely ask that you remark the time. You will have noted that it has just struck ten."

"Go to the devil," said de Guémenée, and strode tempestuously across the room, to pass into the closet to which the Cardinal had withdrawn. He was conscious of being swept along by a tide of ungovernable anger, and this was swollen by the mildness with which the ever urbane Cardinal-Prince received him.

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His Eminence stood reading by a bookcase on the far side of the little room. Between him and his nephew there was a writing-table, on which some documents were pinned down by a paper-weight in the shape of a miniature, but fairly solid, silver battle-axe. At his nephew's gusty entrance he closed the book upon his forefinger and looked up.

"Well, Charles? Has His Excellency satisfied you?"

Recklessly out of his towering passion the young man answered: "Do you suppose me as besotted as yourself that I could condescend to listen to that charlatan's impostures?"

"Charles!" His Eminence raised his brows, his eyes grew round in horror. "I think you are wanting in respect."

"What respect do you inspire, you, a Prince of the House of Rohan, lending yourself to the swindling plans of this scoundrel, this gaol-bird?"

His Eminence stiffened where he stood. His voice was cold and stern.

"Monsieur, you go too far. You will leave my house at once, and you will never enter it again until you have sued for and obtained pardon, both from me and from Monsieur de Cagliostro, for your insulting words."

"Sue pardon from this mountebank! I?"

"On your knees, Monsieur."

"Why, you fool," stormed Monsieur de Guémenée, lost in his rage to reason and decency alike, "do you know what he is? Do you know, for example, that in England he was gaoled for swindling and for debt? I have proofs of it, and . . ."

"I care not what you have, Monsieur. You will leave my house at once. I do not permit myself to be addressed in such terms as those which you have employed. You have gone too far. You have forgotten the respect due, not only to my person, but to my office. In all my life this has never happened to me before. You say that this man has been gaoled for debt. Whether it is true or not, that fate is one that is very likely to overtake you in the near future; for from this moment you cease to interest me; you may wrestle with your own difficulties, and yourself satisfy the creditors you have abused, as you have abused my patience and my good nature. Not another penny of mine shall stand between you and the fate you have invited."

"My God!" cried Monsieur de Guémenée. But even now there was more anger than dismay in his soul.

"With that knowledge take your departure, sir, and do not venture to return. You are an ingrate whom I never wish to see again."

Trembling with fury, Monsieur de Guémenée steadied himself with a hand upon the writing-table. He controlled himself to ask in a voice that was steady, dangerously steady, considering his condition: "Is that your last word, Monseigneur."

With a great dignity the Cardinal replied: "My last word, Monsieur."

"Then your last word it shall be,"

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said his frenzied nephew, and, snatching up the silver battle-axe, he hurled it straight and true at his uncle's august head. He saw it strike him full upon the brow before His Eminence could so much as put up a hand to avert the unexpected missile; he saw the blood gush forth; saw the tall scarlet figure sway an instant where it stood, the fine hands clawing the air as if seeking a support; then, with a sound as of a rush of wings, the Cardinal-Prince sank together, crumpled and fell, to lie inert.

Terror-stricken by his deed, his blind rage driven forth by panic, Monsieur de Guémenée leaned forward over the table, clawing its sides with nerveless hands. "Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" he cried, in a choking wail, then sprang past the table and went to kneel beside the fallen man. Horror came up like a great tide about him at sight of the gaping vertical wound in the brow, where the axe, hard-driven at close quarters, had split the skull. His Eminence was quite dead.

Then, as he knelt there, paralysed in body and in spirit, he heard the door open softly behind him. He looked up and round, to behold Cagliostro, stern and grim, upon the threshold.

"Wretched man, what have you done?" asked the vibrant voice.

The Prince leapt to his feet. There was blood on his hands and on the ruffles at his wrists. "It is your act," he raved. "Yours. It is you who are responsible for this."

Cagliostro preserved a terrible calm. "Tell that to your judges if you think it will save you from being broken on the wheel, from being disembowelled alive for this hideous parricide. Ah, you quail! But that is the least of the punishment in store for you. You will have earned the execration of all upright men for this horrible murder of your uncle and benefactor. Your name will hereafter become a byword."

"Cease! In God's name, cease!" cried Monsieur de Guémenée. "Do you think I do not realize it?" And then his tone changed to a piteous whine. "Sir, sir, you are reported to possess more than human powers. Of your pity, help me in this my dreadful need."

"Ah! You believe in me now. It is true that I possess more than ordinary human powers; but the power to raise the dead is not within them."

"Is it not? Is it not?" Monsieur de Guémenée reverted abruptly to his earlier frenzy. He was leering now with wicked cunning. "So much the worse for you. Since yours is the blame, you shall bear the punishment. I will rouse the house, and declare that it was you who did this thing. What then, my friend? What then? Will your word weigh against mine, do you suppose?"

Cagliostro smiled. "Ingenious. Unfortunately there is a witness. Look behind you, Monsieur."

Startled, Monsieur de Guémenée looked round. Dimly in the shadows of a farther doorway, a doorway of

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whose existence he had been in ignorance, he discerned the figure of a man. Looking more closely his straining eyes recognized the Baron de Planta. "How long have you been there, Monsieur?" he asked.

Cold and stern the Baron answered him: "From the moment that you threw the axe."

The courage went out of Monsieur de Guémenée, taking all fury with it. He raised his blood-stained hands in a gesture of impotence. "What shall I do? *Mon Dieu*, what shall I do?"

"What are you prepared to do if I can save you?" asked Cagliostro.

Monsieur de Guémenée faced him; advanced towards him.

"Save me, do you say? Do you mock my distress? What help can you, what help can any, give? You have said that you cannot raise the dead."

"True. But I can undo what is done. Even that is possible to such as I, for I am He Who Is. Listen, my prince, and seek to understand. This deed of yours is something done in time. Time, sir, is not a reality, not one of the fundamental verities. It is an illusion, a human convention for the measuring of actions concerned with our little moment of existence, this heartbeat in eternity which we call life. To such as I who stand untrammelled by the bonds of time, the past and the future are as they are in eternity; that is to say they are not at all; for in eternity there is always and only the present. If I were to turn time back for you, Monsieur de Guémenée; if I were to turn it back to the moment at which you rose to go in quest of your uncle, so that all that now lies in the past would lie once more in the future and would be inevitable — if I were to do this, what would you do for me?"

"For you?" Monsieur de Guémenée could only stare and stare. Nevertheless, he answered the fantastic question, passionately sobbing, "God knows there is nothing that I would not do."

Cagliostro approached him, smiling gently. "I ask a little thing of you in return for so much. You have procured from England evidence that I was in prison there. You have been at great pains to do this simply so that you might destroy my credit with your uncle, and raise a barrier to my accompanying him to Paris. I am not the first great prophet who has suffered imprisonment. Some have even been put to death by the vicious ignorance of men. For myself I fear nothing from that revelation. But others whom I am concerned to help and serve must suffer if, yielding to prejudice, they should turn from me.

"What I offer you now is this: if you will swear to me on your honour as a gentleman to destroy this evidence which you have wasted such pains in obtaining and never to mention this matter to a living soul, I on my side will so put back the clock for you, that what has been will be still to come and may therefore be avoided. Do you swear, Monsieur?"

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There was such firm authority in the voice that even the Sadducean mind of Monsieur de Guémenée was more than half conquered by it. Feebly the other half still battled with reason.

"What you are proposing is impossible."

"Will you make the experiment? Will you swear as I require? It is your only hope."

Desperately came the answer: "I swear! I swear!" and in pursuit of it the oath was circumstantially given in the terms Cagliostro dictated.

As Monsieur de Guémenée uttered the last formidable word of it, his senses swam. He had a moment of faintness, which even as it overtook him he attributed to the strain of what he had endured. Then his senses cleared, and as sight, momentarily occluded, was restored to him, he found himself in the library, seated once more in the tall red chair, his legs composedly crossed.

For a moment he could not understand how he had come there, or, indeed, anything. His wits were in chaos. Then, out of it, emerged a sharp pellucid perception of the thing he had done and of the horrible situation in which he found himself. Wild-eyed he looked round, and saw Cagliostro standing as before by the overmantel in such a position that his shoulders eclipsed the face of the Sèvres clock. He stood with wide-planted feet, his countenance as enigmatically calm as that of Amhitaba upon his nenuphar.

"Well, sir? Well?" The sight of him thus stirred Monsieur de Guémenée to distraction. "You know what is to do."

The booming voice answered him. "It is done."

"Done? It is done?"

Cagliostro shrugged in weariness. "The stupidity of human nature can be unfathomable. Did you expect to witness some visible, material operation? What is done is an effort of the spirit, of the will, sir. Look at your hands."

The Prince obeyed. He turned his hands about as he stared at them. They were white and clean; there was no faintest trace of blood upon them or upon his ruffles. Vacantly, foolishly, he looked again at Cagliostro, and Cagliostro answered the agonized question in those wide eyes.

"I have accomplished no less than I promised, Monsieur de Guémenée. We have stepped back in time." He moved aside, disclosing the face of the blue and gold Sèvres clock, and as he moved it began to strike the hour of ten, just as it had struck in the moment before de Guémenée had risen to go to his uncle.

A sense of awe encompassed him, of a quite different order from the last. His heart was beating in his throat; he had a sensation of stifling. He was in the presence of forces that he could not understand. Then, with reviving scepticism, another dread arose. He was the dupe of some imposture. Hands could be wiped; clocks could be turned back; but the

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dead could not be restored to life.

As if answering his thought, Count Cagliostro crossed the room to the closet door, opened it, and spoke.

"I think Your Eminence will now find Monsieur de Guémenée persuaded of the error with which he did me injustice."

From within the closet he was answered by a movement made manifest by the rustle of silken robes, and, as Monsieur de Guémenée sat forward, wild-eyed, clutching the arms of his chair, the tall handsome figure of the Cardinal came into view and paused under the lintel. His Eminence, smooth of brow and calm of eye, composed and urbane as ever, was quietly smiling his satisfaction.

"I knew he would find it easy to convince you, Charles, and I rejoice in it. Men of the same blood must hold together in all important things." His elegant hand was placed affectionately upon Cagliostro's shoulder. "You will find His Excellency, Charles, the arch-enemy of all fraud and error. Trust him as I do, and you cannot fail to profit by it."

"I think he holds the proof of that," said Cagliostro quietly.

Monsieur de Guémenée, breathing with difficulty, answered nothing. He asked himself had he merely dreamt, was he still dreaming, or had some unfathomable miracle been wrought? Then, as his uncle advanced into the room, he remembered the deference due to that august personage, and staggered like a drunkard to his feet.

Many years later, in his prison in the fortress of San Leo, when his thaumaturgy had brought him into the clutches of the Holy Office, Cagliostro told this story to a young Dominican who had been charged to show him the error of his ways.

"When we reflect," he ended, "that all this that the Prince de Guémenée had seen and heard and felt and done had no existence save in my mind and will, may we not ask what, after all, is objective truth?"

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In his always stimulating, sometimes brilliant column, "Speaking of Books," in "The New York Times Book Review," J. Donald Adams once wrote: "Personally, I feel some trepidation in discussing the whys and wherefores of mystery fiction, because, although I have read a fair amount of the best in the field, I am by no means qualified to offer myself as a tried and true fan." Nevertheless, Mr. Adams goes on to say: "May such an obvious impostor as myself put forth one or two apologetic questions on this sacred ground?" And one of the questions Mr. Adams asks is "why must the man from Scotland Yard, or the chief of our homicide bureau at home, always be presented as having the mental agility of my old friend Zip, whose egg-shaped cranium used to bob above the crowd as it circulated below the platforms of the freaks in the basement of Madison Square Garden . . ."

Mr. Adams has a point, but the point is not as sharp as it used to be. In recent years there has been a growing movement on the part of detective-story writers to make their official policemen realistic. If anything, the pendulum is now in danger of swinging to the other extreme. But there are some writers who have never depicted their detective characters as "dumb cops" or as "the butt of derision and contempt." One of those writers is Thomas Walsh.

Indeed, we have heard some acute observers make the statement that Thomas Walsh does not write detective stories — even when his chief character is a professional detective. It is far more accurate, if simpler, to say that Thomas Walsh writes cop stories, and the distinction implied is not a quibble or a splitting of hairs. "Cop stories," in the sense that they describe Thomas Walsh's work, implies not only a foundation in realism, but a solid structure rather than a false front. The basic truth is, Walsh's detectives are always human beings — and that makes the crucial difference.

WOMAN EXPERT

by THOMAS WALSH

SHE wasn't at all the kind of girl Kerrigan had built up in his mind. Small and dark, rather sturdy, with cheeks flushed rosily from the cold and crystals of snow sparkling on the collar of her worn fur coat, she came down the aisle behind the porter, smiling a little, obviously excited.

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When the porter had racked the luggage on the shelf above her chair, Kerrigan had just a side glimpse of thick dark hair drawn back severely about a round young face — a glimpse that for a moment worried him, until he saw the man in the gray coat and brown hat walk down the station platform outside and stop by her window to light a cigarette. That was the finger; the handover; and, relieved, Kerrigan yawned and picked up his newspaper, deciding that this girl of Scarfe's was nobody's dumbbell. The get-up was good; he'd have to be careful. Even a woman expert would never have picked her out of a crowd as Johnny Scarfe's girl.

In a moment they began to glide past the platform, deserted now save by a few redcaps and the man in the gray coat, who was hurrying along toward the nearest stairway with his collar bundled high about his face. He did not look up as they went by, and Kerrigan, warm and relaxed, seeing the skirts of his coat bellied out by the wind, rather pitied him. Out here they certainly had winters.

Kerrigan shivered delicately and edged his sharp young face deeper into the cushion at his back. It was a bit small for his body, that face, under black hair that curled crisply, close clipped above his temples; and very handsome too with its genial, Irish-blue eyes, its straight mouth that had a twist of perpetual and audacious good humor crinkled at its corners. Little Boy Blue, he was called sometimes in certain quarters — though rarely to his face. Lou Evans favored the woman expert, but that, Kerrigan conceded, wasn't bad, though you had to know how to say it the right way. Men who knew Kerrigan usually said it the right way.

He thought of all that with a complacent comfort as he sprawled out in the chair, his lean, big-knuckled fingers resting on his knees. He didn't think of the girl very much until the white-coated Negro came down the aisle with the first call to dinner, for he had decided that he shouldn't push things too much; there was plenty of time. New York was still a night away and, as it happened, he didn't have to make the break at all. Things couldn't have been better.

The diner was crowded when he entered, with only one vacant table for two; and he'd just finished his tomato juice when the steward ushered the girl to the chair across from his. She seemed pretty enough, rather timid, a bit too unconscious of him as she read the menu. And Kerrigan himself seemed abashed, avoiding her eyes and clearing his throat several times, until the silence became awkward. Then, hesitatingly, he remarked that it was bad weather.

She looked at him for the first time, with big dark eyes that seemed to have no guile about them.

"It's January," she said, after a moment.

Kerrigan had his cue.

"Back East," he said, "we don't get winters like this. Baltimore's my

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home town. It snows once or twice, and we get cold snaps all along, but day after day —" He shook his head wryly. "I guess it's all right; I'm not knocking it. Only I hope my next time out it'll be summer."

Supply them with a lead, the woman expert knew, and it all would be much easier. She asked, of course, if it was his first visit, so Kerrigan, without being forward, could plant the whole story in her mind. The accountant, the main office in Chicago, the chance at a managership, the interview with the big boss —

"I don't know," he went on, with the grin that he could touch up to wistful shyness, "what the boss thought of me. I'm afraid to hope."

It had been, the woman expert sensed, the right method. It made him a worried young man, nice, and in no way fresh. When she said she wouldn't worry, it would probably turn out just the way he wanted it, the woman expert knew he had her.

Later, in the club car, where there was no question about their sitting together, there was a faint starry stir of excitement in her eyes. It seemed that she hadn't thought there were any trains like this, with lamps and little tables. The woman expert didn't have to lead her on. She was going all the way to New York, to a job — a fine job. There was a glow in her face when she spoke the name. New York! It was, she said, an — an adventure.

In his berth, smoking a last cigarette with an empty toothpaste carton for an ashtray, Kerrigan decided she was very good or a natural. She sounded small-town all right — she was small-town; but, then, even small towns had their measure of off-color dames. Still, if he didn't know this one was Johnny Scarfe's girl . . . The woman expert, slightly amused by himself, yawned and switched off the light. Just before going to sleep he wondered drowsily what names she'd call him when the blowoff came. He'd bet she couldn't think of any that hadn't been used.

In the morning, as they entered the tunnel, the woman expert got his bags down. He knew now he had her just where he wanted her.

"Awful nice," he said. "It was swell to have someone to talk to. And look —" with just the proper mixture of embarrassment and eagerness — "I'm staying in New York tonight, to see my girl. If you wouldn't be busy — I mean, well —" He looked for a moment confused. "Eleanor works for a ticket agency. She gets passes for all the shows. Tonight we're planning to see the Scandals, and I just thought it might be nice — well, for you to come along. You'd like Eleanor. If you've got a friend we could meet you there, by the theater. If you haven't, come yourself, anyway. They say it's a swell show."

Susan Butler seemed a little uncertain, and Kerrigan didn't push it, but he thought that "come yourself" might decide her. She'd be followed from the station, of course — Johnny Scarfe would never be dumb enough

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to meet her there — but it wasn't hard to slip a tail, even a good one. And Kerrigan, looking shy and eagerly boyish, wanted to work this thing out by himself; he was sure he had her figured.

"I'll be at the Morris," he said. "Call me there if you can make it. Been awfully nice knowing you."

Lou Evans, who had got on the train at Harmon, came through their car then, descending to the platform with them. At the taxi stand Kerrigan shook hands with her, cried, "Don't forget the call," and slipped on the grin once more. Lou Evans was a good shadow, but somehow he had a hunch this girl would slip him.

She did. Along toward five o'clock Kerrigan got the news. After she'd registered at a small hotel, she'd gone down to the subway and asked some people for directions to Times Square. There she'd just made a shuttle train that Lou Evans just missed. It might have been an accident, but Kerrigan, the woman expert, only grinned. "Don't lose your shirts," he said. At the Morris, John Bronson, the house dick, said the call had come in: Miss Butler would meet him at eight.

She was in the lobby at eight, in the same shiny fur, but Kerrigan cursed silently when he saw she was alone. His smile was a little strained as he went forward with Miss Peel, who was the best-looking policewoman he had been able to find.

"I'll check the passes," he said. "You alone, Miss Butler?"

"I don't know. I thought —" She looked anxiously around, while Kerrigan lit a cigarette and felt his heart beating hard. Johnny Scarfe would want to give him the once-over first, of course; he'd been smart to think of Miss Peel. If he didn't like their looks — A tall man in bone spectacles and a long brown coat came out of a drugstore and crossed to them. Susan Butler waved an arm. "Mr. Adams," she called.

The tall man didn't look much like Scarfe. Going only by pictures, Kerrigan wasn't sure of him until he was very close, and Susan Butler was turning to him, speaking. Kerrigan put out his hand. "How are you," he said, and shook his right hand with an earnest, Frank-Carter-of-Baltimore grin, and then smashed him viciously against the chin with a left hook that had all the weight of his body behind it. Little Owen Malley from the undercover squad slipped up behind the man in the brown coat in time to catch him as he staggered back. Steel flashed against the mass of dark coats crowding the lobby. Faces swung toward them, suddenly turned, astounded, while the tall man faced Kerrigan, his glasses hung crookedly across his nose, his hands gathered together behind his back.

It was done deftly and swiftly. Kerrigan picked up Johnny Scarfe's hat and crushed it carelessly on his head, and Malley hustled him out by the shoulder. To the crowd Kerrigan ordered, "Move on, move on," taking

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Susan Butler's arm while she stared at him, pale, stricken dumb.

"Come on," the woman expert said. "You, too, sister."

It was a neat job, even for Cornelius Kerrigan. There was the usual kidding after it, but Kerrigan didn't mind that much, so long as it stayed within bounds. He knew they all felt pretty good about it, despite the cracks; for, three months before, Johnny Scarfe had killed a cop, and so his taking was, in a way, a point of personal honor.

The girl, this Susan Butler, faded from Kerrigan's mind, for she was only one job in many to the woman expert, and the job was done with now — or at least in the D. A.'s hands. The next morning, when he entered the cafeteria on the corner down from headquarters, she wasn't at all in his thoughts; he had, in fact, to frown at her slightly before he remembered who she was. Sitting on the high stool in the cage near the door, she didn't see him as he came in; and after a startled moment Kerrigan went by her to a chair at the end of the long tiled counter along one wall. He said, "Hello, Joe," to a fat man in a white apron busy draining one of the coffee urns, and when the fat man turned he jerked his head toward the front.

"Where did you pick that up?"

Joe was short and clean, comfortable-looking; with red cheeks and bright little eyes. He dried his hands on his apron and came over with a mug of coffee.

"She's new," he said, following Kerrigan's nod with his eyes. "Nice kid. Rose Cady's getting married next week and I had to get someone to take her place. I guess Rose gave up hope of hooking you, Kerrigan."

"Cakes," the woman expert ordered, "and some of those toothpicks you call sausages." He stirred his coffee and looked back again at the cage. "How'd you happen to get her?"

Joe called, "Cakes with, Eddie," and pushed the sugar bowl toward Kerrigan with one hand. "Don't you ever get tired lining them up, fella? She seems like a good kid. Came in late last night and sat around fiddling with a cup of coffee until it was time to close up. I got to talking to her; she looked kind of lost. Got in yesterday from some place out west, thinking that a job was set for her. Somehow or other that blew up, and I guess she didn't have the fare back, though she didn't say so. I felt kinda sorry for her, and I knew Rose wanted to quit a couple of days ahead, to do shopping and all that. So I told her if she wanted to cashier here —"

"Sucker," Kerrigan grunted. "She tell you she was Scarfe's girl?"

Joe's eyes got round and wondering in his fat face. "No!" He looked incredulous. "You kidding, Kerrigan?"

"Do I ever kid?" the woman expert demanded, stirring his coffee irritably. "We got a tip last month that Scarfe hid out in a small town in Indiana and went line and sinker for some dame there — this dame. He got sozzled one night and cried into

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his beer about her, and someone passed the word along. So we got the police out there to keep an eye on her. Day before yesterday they wired in she'd bought a ticket to New York on the afternoon train. She bought it a day ahead, and that gave me time to fly out there and pull the sucker act on the train. We had nothing on her but we knew she was heading for Scarfe.

"Scarfe always liked girl shows, and I figured he'd want to celebrate the first night she got to town. Guys like him can't stay cooped up forever, so I said I had passes, and if she wanted to come and bring a friend —" He looked up at Joe moodily. "She came all right, and we put the collar on Scarfe."

"A kid like that," Joe said, looking worried. "You wouldn't believe it. Think I ought to get rid of her?"

"Before she walks off with the store."

"Yeh." Joe rubbed his forehead vaguely. "I guess I'd better. This afternoon; soon's I get another."

But it didn't really surprise Kerrigan when she was still there that evening. Joe was a soft-hearted slob, and all this Susan Butler had to do was pull the old line on him. Small-town kid — no money. He could see Joe mumbling helplessly between his teeth, looking uncomfortable. Well — But she couldn't pull that stuff on Kerrigan. He was grimly amused when she tried it. She paled a little at first as he presented his check, and then grabbed his arm. "Oh!" she said. "Wait a minute, please. I want to —" The woman expert only grunted, "Save it, sister," and scooped up his change. He didn't have to find out about women from her. Women were Kerrigan's job. Some cops remembered faces, and some never forgot license tags, so that if a hundred cars went by them they'd pick out the stolen ones just by looking at the tags. But Cornelius Kerrigan knew women. They were his knack.

Joe, however, was different; every night he'd argue about Susan Butler. "Look, Kerrigan," he'd say, "suppose she's telling the truth?"

Kerrigan would grin wearily and ask him to shut up. He'd give this Susan Butler credit because she was smarter than the rest. She never tried to see Scarfe, or write to him, and she gave up trying to put over her story on Kerrigan. After a while her face was as cold and detached as the woman expert's own when he gave her his check. The boys noticed that. "Falling down?" they asked. The ribbing got under his skin. "Say," Kerrigan growled, "in a month I could have that dame shining my shoes. You want to bet?"

None of them did, but Kerrigan had done it anyway, perhaps to show them, perhaps because it seemed to reflect on his professional ability, perhaps for some other reason that would never enter a woman expert's mind. He turned on the charm, not overdoing it, little by little — just making out he'd been wrong, and stopping by her desk a bit longer

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every day to talk. In two weeks he was taking her to the movies. In a month she was crazy about him.

The funny part was that this one time Kerrigan guessed he had been wrong. She'd never been Scarfe's girl; she'd just swallowed his hot air about the broker, and the job. She hadn't known what she was walking into. Kerrigan knew that was the truth, because nobody, not even a woman, could keep on lying like that. He wasn't fooled into it, Kerrigan, because he never made a pass at her; he never kissed her. One night, indeed, he asked her why she didn't go back to Indiana.

"It's queer," she said, her round young face grave and quiet. "I'd always thought of it as home and now it isn't — it's just like another place on the map. It's like here." She stopped a moment; but before the woman expert could put in something about the movies she went on, softly: "You've been nice to me — you and Joe. You're the only people I know. Oh, they try to make dates at the counter — I don't mean that. You're the only ones who —"

Even at the movies Kerrigan was uncomfortably aware that her thoughts were running like that. All the way home she held his arm, and in the doorway, after they'd said good night, she came very close to him.

"Cornelius," she said, in that grave voice of hers, "you were so nice on the train, so — oh, I don't know. But it wasn't only your job, Cornelius? You did like me? I'm so lonesome when I don't see you. I think you're only making out again, perhaps. That you don't really —"

A woman expert shouldn't have kissed her and told her he did mean it. Kerrigan knew that, of course, but what else could he do? It was the old song and dance.

It was a queer thing he fought against — a mingling of pride and injured vanity and the dreary knowledge of all the years since they'd kidded a rookie at a Bronx precinct house about his attraction for women. You'll have to do better than that, Cornelius Kerrigan thought — much better, sister. He wasn't forgetting any angles. He knew how they started, trying to make you feel sorry for them, trying to get the soft spot in you. Sometimes you couldn't cure that soft spot; but if you were a woman expert, if you knew your way, you wouldn't give it a start.

The woman expert didn't give it a start. For a week he simply avoided Joe's and that kid who'd tried to give him the business. And on the last night of that week Johnny Scarfe escaped from custody.

Even Kerrigan didn't find out much about the method of his escape, for everyone around headquarters was pretty sore, and things were kept under the hat. There was a story that Powell was grilling the guards, who claimed that Johnny Scarfe had suddenly pulled a gun on them as they brought him back from the visitors' room; but Lou Evans scoffed at that

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story. Johnny Scarfe's wife, he said, had visited him that afternoon; if she brought along a bundle of cash, to be split three ways among three so-and-so turnkeys —

Kerrigan himself didn't believe it was bribery. Dora Scarfe might have found some way to pass him a gun; but she wasn't handing out any cash. Kerrigan was sure of that because he knew the kind of dame Dora Scarfe was. Fat and almost forty, with blond hair that anyone could see didn't go with her dark, bold eyes, Dora Scarfe knew how to take care of herself. That type was only rabbits to Kerrigan. Fifteen years younger, he could find a dozen for you in any dance hall. Baby-eyed and hard-hearted, nobody's sucker, using perfume and highly colored nail polish, reading confession magazines and tabloids, they had given the woman expert his easiest assignments. A dame like that was always on the make, always looking out for number one; but if you knew how they reacted they were apple pie. Johnny Scarfe had married this Dora years ago, and deserted her off and on since; for the tall punk fancied himself as a ladies' man, and Dora Scarfe wasn't a bargain any more.

Kerrigan figured she wouldn't know any more where Johnny Scarfe was than a fortune-teller, and when Lou Evans and his partner were detailed to follow her he thought it was an awfully dumb move. With someone like the blonde, the thing to do was make her jealous; give him five minutes alone with her, he thought, and she'd spill the story of how he got out. That night in his room he was wondering if it wouldn't be a good idea to try to get in touch with her when the phone rang.

"Listen," Joe said. "Susan called. She said she wanted to see you."

"Okay," Kerrigan grunted, and hung up. Going over to the table he poured himself a small nip of Irish whisky, drank it, and balanced the empty glass thoughtfully on his palm. The woman expert could picture what was coming up.

Kerrigan coached himself thoroughly before starting; he made it very clear how he was going to act, and why he would see her at all. Things like this were better cleared up, with no loose ends. . . .

It was, in theory, simple enough, but Kerrigan felt a dryness in his throat as he went up the stairs. She was standing in her open doorway, outlined against the light, and Kerrigan said, "Hello," in a surly fashion, brushed by her, and sat down inside with his light gray fedora resting on his knees. She started off as he had known she would, uncertainly, because he would not look at her face. When he hadn't come into Joe's all week she was afraid something had happened; she thought he was ill.

"Busy," he said, with a rasp in his voice. When she didn't answer, his eyes came up to her at last, and when he saw her face a kind of dumb anguish broke in him. She was trying

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to smile, and saying something about she just hadn't known.

"All right," Kerrigan mumbled. He transferred his hat from one knee to the other, and he wondered how guys like Evans ever got married —

He awoke to what he was thinking with a stunned horror; and then in a moment the horror was gone, and Cornelius Kerrigan, the woman expert, said huskily, "Wait a minute. Don't look like that."

He got up, although he didn't know what he was going to do — maybe get the hell out of there. He felt caught and in the wrong, and when the door to the hall opened behind him he looked at it dumbly.

Johnny Scarfe came in. He pushed the door shut with his left shoulder and then leaned against it, watching Kerrigan for what seemed a long time. Kerrigan wasn't a fool. He didn't move or drop the hat out of his hands; he just stood very still. He could see the automatic in Johnny Scarfe's right hand.

After that long while Johnny Scarfe said, "Get his keys," to the girl. "His car keys. We'll need a car. Then cut some rope out of your drier in the kitchen and tie his hands behind him, around his chair. Move."

When she bent over him for the keys Kerrigan closed his eyes so that he wouldn't have to see her. It was all very simple: they'd needed a car. And she had said, "If I call Kerrigan —" They had probably laughed about it. Johnny Scarfe would have advised her to put on the weeps.

And Kerrigan took the blame; he accepted it with a rage that was as cold and hard as ice in his heart. He'd been a fool.

She was standing by the door now, very pale, watching him.

"Go downstairs," Johnny Scarfe said. "Get started."

"Sure," Kerrigan said. "Go on. You can always tell yourself you didn't know what he was going to do. You don't have to read the papers."

"Cornelius," she whispered. "Cornelius, do you think I knew he was coming? I don't know how he found me. I thought if I did what he asked he wouldn't hurt you. That's why — I won't let him kill you, Cornelius."

"Baby," Johnny Scarfe said, touching the side of her cheek with the barrel of his gun, "go downstairs. Now. While you can walk. I went to a lot of trouble looking you up; I took a chance of running into a nest of coppers to pick you up tonight. You go with me or you stay here — right on your back, baby."

She stared at Kerrigan.

"I'll stay," she said.

The woman expert started to speak, but his voice was drowned out in the sudden bang of the downstairs door — a sharp sound that made Johnny Scarfe's tall body rigid. Quick, light steps pattered on the stairs, and swiftly and quietly he moved against the wall. "Squeak," he said, looking back. "Just squeak once, Kerrigan."

The steps came up past the first landing; an instant before they

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reached the second, Johnny Scarfe had kicked the door ajar. Dora Scarfe stood on the threshold.

The tall man swore softly, with relief, with anger.

"Damn you!" he said. "Why did you come here? Didn't you know they'd follow you?"

Dora Scarfe cried shrilly: "I hope they have! Do you hear that?"

Her face was twisted in a sobbing frenzy; mascara streaked the dark eyes. She looked older, haggard.

Her eyes darted to Susan Butler, glittering with triumph, with the venomous hate that lay deep in the lines of her mouth. From his chair, looking at her, and remembering that Lou Evans and his partner had been watching her, Kerrigan saw that this was how women were, this was how they betrayed you. Johnny Scarfe must have had the same thought, because he moved over to the window, flattening his body against the wall. There he cursed softly and crossed to the dark kitchen. In a moment he was back, his face pale and shiny in the light of the lamp.

"Covered," he said slowly. "A guy front and back. The place is bottled up. In five minutes they'll have a squad car here."

Very carefully Kerrigan began to loosen his bonds. Susan Butler hadn't gathered them very tightly.

Going over to the door the tall man stopped before it, with the funny shine still on his face, and the bones in it outlined as if they had been marked with white chalk. His lips were a crazy color — like liver, Kerrigan thought. After a moment he rubbed them, looked at Kerrigan, at the windows, at the blonde.

"Thanks," he said, stolidly and harshly. "Thanks for turning me up, baby. They're set out there; they're waiting. I go out and it's like doing the Dutch act."

Dora Scarfe whimpered something that sounded like: "Johnny, Johnny." Her expression was puffy, stupid, the way she'd look waking from sleep. "I didn't mean to, Johnny. I didn't know. When Al told me he'd found out for you where she lived, when I thought you were here, with her — I guess I was crazy, Johnny." She put her palms against her temples and closed her eyes, staying like that for a long time. "How many are there — two?"

Kerrigan chuckled harshly. "That's all they'll need."

She didn't heed him. Crossing to the tall man she gripped his wrist.

"Listen, Johnny — give me your hat and coat. There isn't much light in the yard. I'll look like you. The one in front will come running back; the street will be clear. You can get away then, through the front."

Kerrigan glanced up at her, narrow-eyed. He knew the type — he could tell how their minds ran and who they always looked out for, but for a minute he couldn't figure her play. They were tricky enough; this wasn't a bad idea. The only trouble with it was that she didn't see the catch.

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Kerrigan showed her the catch. He explained very carefully: "Go out in that derby and nobody's going to ask you questions. You won't get three steps. Maybe you didn't think of that, sister."

She looked at him then rather blankly with Johnny Scarfe's big coat lapping down to her heels. But she didn't answer him, and the tall man, licking his lips once with just the tip of his tongue, handed her the derby hat.

"Write to me," she said, crumpling the hat down over her hair. "You know where, Johnny. Let me know how you are. And don't you worry about me."

"Sure," the tall man said in a husky voice. "Sure, baby."

Kerrigan thought maybe she meant to snatch his gun, and plug him to get herself clear — or maybe, at the yard door, she meant to call Lou Evans and tell him how things were upstairs. Kerrigan knew what dames like this were. Still, sometimes they did stupid things; and he wanted her to see just how things stood.

"They won't play cops and robbers with you, sister. Go out there and you walk into a bullet. That derby —"

She looked back at Johnny Scarfe from the doorway, and she was scared. Kerrigan could see that; her voice, shaky and pretty low, proved it. She was saying something about not to worry, to be sure to write. Then she was gone, and Kerrigan had a funny feeling in his stomach. The room was very quiet; her footsteps died on the stairs. Kerrigan's face felt clammy. He knew she was going to call Lou Evans, to tell him —

"Lou!" he yelled, just to be sure.

The tall man was over him in two leaps, smashing the gun butt against his head. Things swam. When they cleared he was on the floor, on his side, and the cords were loose around his wrists. Susan Butler was holding his head, and calling him Cornelius in a quick, panicky fashion. At the door Johnny Scarfe was bent forward, listening, one hand clenched at his side, the other tense on the knob.

There was a shout, two shots, close together and echoless as Kerrigan tore his hands free from the bonds, tore his body clear of the chair. Johnny Scarfe was moving with the shots; before Kerrigan got up he was through the door, and had it locked behind him. It was a solid door, set deep in the wall, and it threw Kerrigan's first lunge back as if it had been made of rubber. He didn't wait for a second; shaking off Susan Butler's hold, he ran to the front window and thrust it up. The stone arch that covered the doorway loomed out over the stoop, a floor below him, as he had remembered it. In an instant he was through, lowering himself from the sill by his arms, and dropping when they were out straight from his body.

That way the arch was only four feet below him. No wider than a coffee table, it angled to a point in the center, sloping down sharply on either side. Kerrigan struck the left of it with his knees, grabbed the edge

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with a desperate lunge, and was torn free from that by the jerk of his body. That instant broke his fall, although he didn't catch the stoop flat; his feet struck crookedly on the rim of the first step and thrust his body backward, so that he caromed down the stairs on his back, as Johnny Scarfe came through the doorway and jumped over him. The only thing Kerrigan could grasp was his ankle. Johnny Scarfe stumbled, and smashed his fingers loose with the gun. Then he was past Kerrigan, running from his knees like a drunken sprinter staggering for balance. The gun he had dropped ceased spinning on the pavement, three feet from Kerrigan's hand.

He got to it just as Johnny Scarfe reached the corner. Kerrigan had medals at home — sharpshooters' medals — and the tall man wasn't ten yards away. The gun felt small and solid, part of his hand, as he fired. From his knees he watched Johnny Scarfe fall, roll over, and become formless and still against the house wall.

Slowly Kerrigan got up, wobbling and jarred. There was blood all over the four fingers of his left hand, and he stared at them for a moment dazedly, before going up the stoop and into the hall as Lou Evans ran through from the yard.

"A woman!" he cried. "A woman with his hat and coat on. Where's Scarfe?"

Kerrigan jerked his head backward, and went on through the dim corridor to a door that pushed open on the blacker space of the yard. A man and Dora Scarfe were out there, almost at his feet; the man was standing up. Looking at Kerrigan as he stopped there, in the doorway, the blonde managed to whisper one word. The word was: "Johnny?"

"He got away," Kerrigan said heavily. "He snatched my car."

After the ambulance came he walked back to the stairs, to where Susan Butler stood, holding his injured hand in the pocket of his coat, so that she wouldn't see it. With his good arm around her, he said it was all right, it was all over; he didn't even mind when she called him Cornelius. "Now, now," he said softly, patting her shoulder, and not caring what Lou Evans and the rest would say if they saw him.

Something was done with inside the woman expert; something that all the Maizies and Emmas and Ruths couldn't change. He felt that, although it remained dim — he could only picture it obscurely by thinking of the way that Dora Scarfe had whispered a word in the yard. Women! He was glad he had lied to her, and he was glad he was holding this Susan Butler, because he never wanted to let her go now. They could betray you; and they could give you something. What?

Cornelius Kerrigan couldn't name it, but in the dim hallway, holding her, it seemed that if you had that, if you were sure of it, even a woman expert wouldn't be sucker enough to let it go.

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Mr. John Mason Brown on the subject of A. A. Milne: "Very definitely a certain sort of person. He is sensitive. He can write charmingly. He can be witty in the fluffiest tradition of English Wit, and his prose is at once facile and precise." We doubt if Mr. Brown was thinking of Mr. Milne's detective stories — but all he says is 'tec true . . .

IT COULD HAVE HAPPENED THAT WAY

by A. A. MILNE

FORGET the detective story. I'm not saying that because I have written one detective story I'm a good detective. What I do say is that any writer who makes his living by creative fiction is well fortified to do just what your policemen have to do."

"And what's that?"

"Invent a story which accounts for all the facts and suspicions and discrepancies which the case presents. That's our daily job, inventing stories; making a definite pattern of a number of incidents. Why, I could contrive some sort of story out of *any* assortment of facts: a spot of candle grease, a badly sharpened pencil, a canary which wouldn't sing any more, and a man who went to bed one night with his wooden leg." Even as he said this, Colby began to wonder what the story would be. Better start with the canary . . .

Colonel Saxe went to his desk and unlocked a drawer. He took out a loose-leaf file of papers and said, "Like to try?" Colby came back to his surroundings suddenly, and said, "Oh — what's that?"

"Our latest murder." The Chief Constable sat down again and began to turn the pages. "You'd better look at this. It shows you the house in relation to the rest of the town. That's important."

Colby looked at it, and said plaintively, "Can't I have a plan of the room, with X marks the spot?"

"That particular room doesn't matter so much. Still, here you are: bedroom where the body was found, living-room where the girl and the man were drugged."

Colby took them, and said, "Drugs too. I *am* going to enjoy this."

"I'll just give you the set-up. Wavetree — silly name — is a bungalow about three hundred yards outside Easton, which is a small country town in my district. It's got a bit of garden, front and back, and there are half a dozen houses, mostly pretty good ones with a fair amount of land, between it and the town. There were four people at the bungalow that

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Sunday afternoon. Norris Gaye, the owner, now deceased: elderly, miserly, an invalid, or anyway he preferred to live like one, and generally, I should say, was a crotchety unpleasant person and a great trial to his niece Phyllida. She is thirty *minus*, very capable, very good-looking in a big, healthy way, if you know what I mean — Captain of Hockey type — and runs the house and her uncle single-handed. Phyllida's brother Douglas — hot-tempered, who-the-devil-are-*you*-sort-of-cove — lives in London, test driver for racing cars, generally dashed down to lunch on a Sunday, and dashed off again, but whether from love for his sister or to keep in with his rich uncle, I can't say."

"Did they know he was rich?"

"I think so. Even living as he did, he must have had something to leave. In fact, the girl gets an annuity of £500 and the boy the residue, about £20,000. The fourth person was Mark Royle. You may have come across him: thirty *plus*, French and German scholar, translates books. Very reliable, I've known his people for ages; very intelligent, Field Security in the war, and did a good job. I say all this because he is our chief witness."

"You wouldn't let me make him the murderer?"

"That's up to you: you'll see. Personally I have no doubts about him. Well, now, there's a confectioner's in the town where people go for coffee in the mornings. A few weeks ago Royle and Phyllida had run into each other, literally, just outside it, and when he had picked her parcels up, and apologized — well, there they were having coffee together, and telling each other their names. And it wasn't surprising, seeing what a good-looking couple they are, that they were doing it again next morning. And so on."

"Both fancy-free at the time?"

"More or less. The girl wears an engagement ring, rather a good one, but the fellow was missing-believed-killed in the war, as Royle was not sorry to hear. I suppose she saw him looking at it and wondering — he seems to have fallen for her rather. One Sunday he came to lunch."

"To ask Uncle?"

"Oh, no. She wanted him to meet her brother. Just friendly on her part; probably still thinking of the other man. The three of them lunched together in the dining-room; Uncle was being an invalid in his bed-sitting-room, looking out on to the front garden; and after lunch they went into the living-room. Phyllida told her brother to light the fire while she got the coffee — it was a log-fire already laid — and Douglas, when he had got it going, wandered about rather impatiently, looking at his watch. Royle sat down in the arm-chair on the right of the fireplace, as you face it. Phyllida came back with the coffee. She put the tray on the table behind Royle's chair and said, 'Pour it out, Douglas, I must just make sure that Uncle's all right. The cream's for Mr. Royle, special.' Ap-

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parently they had had some joke about that at the coffee shop. Of course, it wasn't real cream, just the top of the milk, and only enough for one. You'll see the point directly."

"I'm seeing it now. Who put the sleeping tablets in what?"

"Exactly. Douglas poured out the three cups, put sugar in his own and Phyllida's, pulled up a stool next to Royle, and put on it the third cup, the cream jug, and the sugar bowl. Royle put in the sugar, poured in the cream very gently so that it rested on the top, and left it for the sugar to melt. Apparently this was a little way of his. Douglas drank his straight off, put his cup back on the tray, and as Phyllida came back, said, 'Sorry, old girl, but I must dash.' She suggested that he should say goodbye to his uncle, and he went out and was back again, Royle says, in a couple of minutes; the door was open and they watched him into his uncle's room and back. Phyllida looked at him a little anxiously when he came back, or so Royle thought, and said, 'All right?' and Douglas said, 'Most genial, but then I wasn't making a touch, and that's all he's afraid of.' They went out to his car, and saw him drive off like-a-bat-out-of — towards the town."

"Exit First Murderer," said Colby. "Or not?"

"You'll see. The other two went back to the living-room. Now, then, I'll read Royle's actual statement, starting from there." He drew out the pages and read. Colby lay back, listening to the words of Royle.

"I sat down in the chair, and she sat on the sofa, which was on the other side of the fireplace and at right angles to it. She drank her coffee and put the cup down on a little table behind the sofa, and then we talked about her brother. After a bit she said, 'Oh, dear, I do feel so tired, it's very rude of me,' and I said, 'Nonsense! Put your feet up and be comfortable.' So she did. I finished my coffee, and was trying to listen to some story she was telling me, but for some reason I couldn't keep my eyes open. I put my hand up, as if to shield my eyes from the fire, so that she wouldn't notice. Then I suddenly realized that she wasn't talking any more, and I opened my eyes with an effort, and saw her lying there, utterly still. Her hand drooped to the ground, and the firelight flickered in her engagement ring. She might have been dead. I knew that I ought to do something — I think I knew then that we had both been drugged — but I couldn't take my eyes off the enormous ruby in that ring; it got bigger and bigger until it filled the whole room and swallowed me up . . . and by that time I suppose I had passed out. I woke up to a smell of burning, and thought vaguely of breakfast, and it took me a little time to realize that I wasn't in bed at home. One of her shoes had fallen off, and I suppose a bit of burning wood had shot onto it from the fireplace, and the leather was smoldering gently. Then I knew where I was. I

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tried to revive her, but she was still completely out. I went into Mr. Gaye's room to find out his doctor's telephone number. He was dead. So I rang up the police. It was just five o'clock."

Saxe returned the statement to the file, and Colby opened his eyes.

"Very good picture. Or is there too much detail? Oh, well, you can take that either way. Now the body."

"Gaye had been stabbed through the heart by a double-edged knife of some sort, but there was no trace of the weapon. It was an hour before the girl was brought round and able to make a statement. Wherever it overlapped Royle's, it confirmed him exactly. Of course we analyzed all the coffee things. Result: traces of an opiate in the two cups, nothing in the third or in the coffee pot, cream jug or sugar bowl."

"And the only person who could possibly have dropped anything in the cups was the brother — at least, according to Royle."

"Yes, and the cups were the only possible medium."

"So you sent out an all-station call for Douglas."

"No."

"You surprise me. I should have thought your Inspector would have jumped at it."

"He didn't, for the simple reason that Douglas was already arrested. He was stopped in the town for dangerous driving, lost his temper, laid out a couple of constables, and was now safely locked up. Blasted fool!"

"But very convenient for you."

"So we thought. But, you see, we searched him, we searched the car, and there was no weapon!"

"It could have been thrown away."

"Where? When? The others saw him off, remember, streaking towards the town. Within a minute he was in trouble with the police. We've searched the room and the garden outside the window of the room; we've searched the front gardens on each side of the road, and the dagger is simply not there. But in any case, Colby, if it was hidden under his coat when he drove off, why should he throw it away at once? By doping the coffee he had given himself at least a couple of hours' start, and could have dropped it in a pond or river a hundred miles away, where it would never be found. Also, with a murder behind him, wouldn't he take especially good care *not* to get into the hands of the police?"

"You'd think so. Yes."

"So there we are. I'll bet my last shilling that Douglas drugged the coffee, but I don't see how he could have killed his uncle. And I'll put my shirt on Royle as an utterly honest and reliable witness, but that means that the girl couldn't have done it either. So there it is. Now make up a story to account for everything, and I shall believe that you really are an author."

"Dear Saxe, I can give you one straight off. The girl stabbed him when she went to see him after lunch. She hid the knife temporarily in the

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back garden — where you never looked — and disposed of it afterwards. To give her a perfect alibi Douglas drugged the two of them, and witnessed that his uncle was alive after Phyllida had left him. To give himself a certain amount of cover, he deliberately got himself arrested. If you'd picked him up two hours later, the absence of the knife wouldn't have been in his favor. Thus, joint murder by the two legatees."

"Good lord, Colby," said Saxe. "I believe you've got it!"

"Yes, but I don't like it. It doesn't do justice to my creative powers. Any policeman could have thought of it. Also, it leaves no alternative suspect, which is bad art, and, from the murderer's point of view, bad management. No, it won't do; there's something wrong somewhere. I was picturing the scene in my delightfully imaginative way — see press clippings — and something went wrong suddenly. Let me take that plan of the room and Royle's statement to bed with me, and I'll tell you the true story tomorrow."

"Well, got the story?"

"Yes. Your Hockey Captain did it on her own, hoping that her little brother would be hanged, thus scooping the pool. Nice girl."

"Impossible!"

"That's what she hoped you'd think."

"I suppose you mean that being in love with the girl, Royle made up his story to save her?"

"Who said anything about Royle? Royle is the perfect witness. That's why the girl bumped into him."

"You're suggesting that she deliberately picked him up?"

"Well, you see, he was just what she wanted: good character, observant, and a slow starter with his coffee."

"My dear Colby, how could she possibly have known beforehand that he drank his coffee slowly?"

"She'd watched him on other mornings. Why not? Now, I'll tell you what happened —"

"In a story," interrupted Saxe, leaving himself free to laugh at it or profit by it.

"In a story," said Colby firmly, "which may or may not — I haven't decided yet — include a very stupid Chief Constable. Here we go. The morphia was in the cream — don't interrupt. All went as Royle told you. There are the two of them sitting by the fire; and in the car, bumping into policemen, which was the last thing she wanted, a witness that the uncle was alive. The plan demands that she shall be the first to drink her coffee, and so now she drinks it undrugged. She pretends to feel sleepy, and puts her feet up. Just as he is beginning to fade away, she goes out with a bump, or so it seems; and, of course, the fact that oblivion (as we novelists say) is descending on him too makes it all very convincing. As soon as he is completely out, she gets up, and in her quick athletic way stabs that very tiresome uncle. She

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has a nice little untraceable grave in the back garden waiting for the dagger, and in it goes. She washes out the cream jug, pours a little undoped cream into it which she has carefully put aside, gives herself a little more coffee, drops in the morphia for herself, stirs, and swallows. Then she lies down again on the sofa and — genuinely this time — passes out. And there she is, and there she has been all the time when Royle wakes up, and there is the dope in the coffee cups and nowhere else. End of story."

"Good lord, you know," said Saxe in astonishment, "it *could* have happened that way!"

"If there is one thing that Author Colby prides himself on, it is his realism. It could."

"But that doesn't say that it did. It's just a story."

Colby was silent.

"Or have you got any proof?" continued Saxe. "Yes, you said there was something wrong in Royle's statement. Is that it?"

"Not in Royle's statement. It couldn't have been more accurate. No; something was wrong in my visualization of the scene. Or so I thought. But on consulting Plan C again in my bedroom, I found that there was nothing wrong in my visualization of the scene. So then I knew that the hockey eleven was going to lose its popular young captain."

"You'll have to explain."

"I insist on explaining. I've been looking forward to explaining ever since 1:30 A.M. When your Inspector arrived on the scene, Phyllida was lying on the sofa *with her feet towards the fireplace* — otherwise, how could a bit of burning wood from the fireplace have got on her shoe, the one that fell off? But Royle's last view of Phyllida before he passed out included the ruby on her engagement hand, hanging over the side of the sofa. A woman's engagement finger is on her left hand. For Royle to have seen Phyllida's left hand hanging over the side of the sofa, with her feet towards the fireplace, the sofa would have had to be on the right side of the fireplace. But Royle had specifically testified that his armchair was on the right of the fireplace, and that the sofa was on the *other* side."

"The sofa *is* on the left."

"Exactly. Which means that she was lying in a drugged stupor with her head to the fire at 2:30, and in the *same* drugged stupor with her feet to the fire at 5. Silly girl."

"My God!"

"Yes."

"I think I'll telephone," said Saxe, getting up.

"At least," said Colby, "you can dig up the back garden. And you might give Royle a hint, or a French novel to translate, or something, to take his mind off the girl. Quite apart from losing your star witness if he marries her, you don't want to spoil his young life. He wouldn't be happy with Phyllida. Too violent for him, don't you think?"

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MURDER WITH MUSIC

by FREDERIC A. BIRMINGHAM

IT IS VERY difficult to sing while you are being choked to death. So thought Fogarty as he heard her upstairs, singing to herself in that hateful, trilly soprano. This evening would do as well as any other. It isn't every suburban community that can boast a good old-fashioned strangling.

There were better ways, but Fogarty found himself liking the whole idea of watching her bright eyes grow dim as he stilled that lovely voice forever. He was not afraid. His alibis were set in advance. After it was done, he could merely slip out of the house and it would be morning before anyone found out what had happened. He had made it a habit to stay out all night every so often, and the neighbors — the only ones who could possibly see him — were too dulled by routine to remember anything even if it happened before their very eyes. They could never trace him even if they saw him. He knew every alley and vacant lot for miles around. He had made it his business to find out.

She would be taking her nap soon: this was the time. Her daily nap! Fogarty bristled at the thought. No concern for him, or what he might want to do, or need to have done for him. She was delicately formed, her voice was precious, and it had become obvious to him all too soon that her interest in him came afterwards.

It hadn't always been that way. Fogarty could remember the time when they delighted in being together, when it was enough to sit there for hours just looking at each other, and wondering about the other's thoughts. That had been a happy beginning, before everyone who knew them was captivated by her skittish little marks of friendship, her radiant pleasure in even the smallest attentions, and the soaring beauty of her voice. Even Fogarty had been taken in by her voice, at first. But now he knew that she lived only for that magic thing in her throat. Even his own friends shuffled him off quickly now for the sake of spending time with her, as if a set of vocal chords meant more than Fogarty's almost perfect male perfection and the many romances thereof. Well, her indifference to him, her incredible vanity, and her insatiable love of attention, would cost her the life that she loved so well.

Fogarty waited until he was sure that she must be asleep, and then he started carefully up the stairs. If she awakened, what matter? He could be looking about for any commonplace reason, and put off her punishment. But he wanted to do it *now*.

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The stairway was visible to the house next door, through a window on the landing, and as he passed it, Fogarty flattened himself against the wall, and crouched down below the line of visibility. No use being seen by some unthinking fool with a wandering eye. Worse if Smudge, the noisy cocker spaniel who belonged next door and never strayed very far from home, were to see him and start his infernal yapping. Fogarty could get along very well without Smudge, too.

He cleared the landing and approached the bedroom door, stealthily. It was slightly open. For all his size and strength, Fogarty could walk as silently as a kitten when he wanted to, thanks to the long training in his lithe, perfectly responsive body. He glided in.

She was asleep. He saw that as he came slowly across the room.

He stood over her for a moment, very near. When he struck, he wanted to strike hard, he wanted it over with as quickly and brutally as possible, without any fuss and feathers, without any outcry.

It is too bad that in that moment there was no pity in Fogarty's hard eyes. It is too bad that one cannot say that some human warmth or feeling of remorse or some remembrance of love did not flick across his mind and stay him. But there was none. Fogarty was cold with hate as he measured her throat with his eyes. *There* was the place to strike, there, near the marvelous voice that had driven him to this, the voice that would never be still until now. There was the place where the voice and the breath came together.

"*Now!*" something inside shrieked to Fogarty, and he reached out and took her in a terrible grip that surprised even himself with its power for death.

Her eyes opened wide, just once, then flickered and flickered as Fogarty kept increasing the awful pressure on her throat. His eyes never left hers. Neither one of them made a sound until he dropped her, and the wind whistled out of his throat, for he had never breathed once while he choked her. He had only felt a wild, exultant joy that dimmed every other sense and thought.

But now, as he turned away, he heard a step downstairs. Then, coming up the stairs! Fogarty crouched close to the bedroom door as he heard Smudge barking next door, excitedly.

They were coming, now, heavy steps near the bedroom door, and Fogarty flung himself out — heard shouts, felt blows rain on his head and shoulders, lashed out in return with all his strength, screaming now in his sickness at being caught, and suddenly a terrible pain shot up through his whole body, as the bedroom door was slammed on his tail.

Fogarty, with the telltale blood on his claws, was caught, caught, caught, but at least the canary, the foolish singer of silly songs, was dead, dead, dead . . .

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Here is the fourth in a series of short riddle stories which derive from folk-lore — from the folk-tales of all ages and nations. The first three, you will recall, had their origin in Chinese, American Indian, and Turkish legend. Now we bring you the tale of an English "witch."

The author of this series — a Philadelphia schoolteacher — reminds us that two hundred years ago the old English "wise-woman" lived apart from other folk, usually in a dim, cavern-like cottage, with raven and cat, and bottles and bags of curious concoctions. At the weirdest hours she would be glimpsed on marsh or moor, gathering herbs, dung, small animals — to brew her healing potions, she said. By means of her acknowledged "second sight" she could foretell dire fate (for those who persecuted her) and marvelous good fortune (for those who professed faith in her lore).

Those benighted "heathens" who feared her usually crossed their breasts and spat when they passed her door — for luck, they said. These misguided souls told tales of the wise-women which curdled the blood and tingled the scalps of their listeners. But wiser folk, though ignorant of coming discoveries in chemistry, psychology, and extra-sensory perception, vaguely realized the truth: it was not the Devil who inspired the English wise-woman — it was her own clever brain, long memory, encyclopedic knowledge, accurate observations, and shrewd intuitions which made her "miracles" possible.

"The Voice of Justice" stems from the devoted labors of a late-19th century collector who saved for posterity the songs, tales, folk-ways, and folk-say of Yorkshire before the Industrial Revolution. It wasn't until 1823 that an Act of Parliament abolished the ancient custom of the breast-stake and crossroads-burial for "persons found felo-de-se." *The events of this story could have occurred a generation or two earlier. . . .*

ENGLISH LEGEND: *The Voice of Justice*

re-told by MARK RONDY

THE crowd gathered at the pond was silent and still beneath the bright noonday sun. Old Liz hobbled through them to a damp blanketed heap and a moaning, swaying woman near it. Old Liz knelt painfully beside the woman, lifted the blanket. The crowd surged forward to see again the streaming blonde hair and the pale face.

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Old Liz pulled the blanket back. She smoothed the sodden clothes, turning up an icy left hand, running gnarled fingers along scratches and welts in the palm, along the bare wet fingers, scratched too on the inner sides. She brought the sprawling legs together, touched the clenched right hand almost in caress, and got to her feet with an agonized wheeze, leaving the dead girl uncovered. . . .

"Here comes Owen Metcalfe!"

The crowd parted again, letting the man stumble through.

"Alice —" he sobbed. "My bonny Alice! . . ." On his knees beside the blanket, he took the white face between his hands and groaned, "Why did you do it?"

Murmurs of sympathy from the onlookers hushed suddenly. Startled, Metcalfe raised his head, and saw the gleaming knife that had appeared in Old Liz's hand. But Old Liz merely reached for the long briar branch overhanging the pond. Two cuts of the knife, a sharp wrench, and the branch was in her hands.

She grimaced a bit from the effort, but said no word, just fell to trimming the branch, peeling off its thorns with the bark.

Metcalfe rose, his face full of venom. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

Old Liz cut slivers from the branch with short choppy strokes of the knife. "The stake to bury her with, that's what I'm making. At the crossroads." She began whittling one end into a fine long point.

"No!" It was the dead girl's mother. "She'll be buried in holy ground!"

Old Liz glanced down, her wrinkled face unsoftened. "Not if she drowned herself. . . ." She straightened, the knife disappearing somewhere into her shapeless brown cloak. "Why did she do it, he wants to know. Why should she drown herself, the bonny lass?"

She looked around at the sombre, expressionless faces. "I'll tell you why. *Him* there —" the stake darted out toward Metcalfe like the Devil's prong — "he bamboozled the lot of you yesterday. Named me a witch, he did, and got you to duck me in this very pond." She spat. "Toad-venom! Hag-worms! Grave-moss! All lies! . . . Eighty years old I am. My potions are good potions. Not a soul among you have I harmed, but many's the one I've helped in trouble. I know somewhat about signs and herbs, maybe, but I'm no more a witch than *he* is a wizard!"

She caught her breath, then continued: "You saw me crawl out, a-holding on to this very branch for dear life. Half-dead I was, in the slime of the bank. And *him* there, waiting! The minute I was up he put out his hand and shoved me back in again! . . . Laughing and pointing he was —" she swept them again with her bitter stare — "and some of you here standing by, you laughed too. And others not laughing but afraid to speak. But *she* wasn't afraid, my bonny Alice. *She* knew I was no witch. She came to me when she

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heard, helped me dry and dress, helped me put a poultice on my bleeding hands. . . ."

Heads were bowed now, and eyes groundward, as they listened to the recital.

"Jenny Stull!" The stake swung over to point out a trembling young girl. "You told us this morning how she came to visit you afterwards, last evening. She told you she was intending to break her engagement with *him*. Found him out, she did, for his foul, cruel doings to me. And she so proud of her ring and all! She was greatly troubled over it, you said, and cried. . . . And her mother thought she was with you, so she left the door unlatched and went to bed. But come morning, no Alice, and her bed not slept in, though she left Jenny Stull, mind you, at eight of the clock. She came to the pond —" the croaking voice boomed out over their heads — "and then what happened?"

Metcalfe answered, "She must have thrown herself in."

"Thrown herself in," repeated Old Liz. "Suicide. . . ." She tested the stake's point with a skinny finger. "Then she's to lie at the crossroads, for the unholy spirit that she is. With *this* through her soft white bosom, till the Day of Doom. . . ."

"No!" The mother screamed it again.

"Yes," continued Old Liz inexorably. "And the man who murdered her, *he*'ll live yet a while, with his guilt hidden in his soul. But when he dies . . ." She shivered involuntarily, and closed her eyes.

"Unless —" her voice came strangely hollow and distant — "unless he owns up. . . . *Then* she may lie in holy ground, in the churchyard, and the Lord may take mercy on his soul." Abruptly she pointed the stake at Owen Metcalfe. "You didn't meet her here, last evening?"

"No! I didn't see her all day yesterday, nor last night either."

The old woman laughed then — a high-pitched, rasping, mirthless cackle. "You didn't quarrel with her, over me? Over breaking the engagement, poor thing, because she'd seen the evil of your soul when you harried me? You didn't plead with her, beg her to come back to you? You didn't lose your temper when it was all no use? You didn't push her in, hold her under till she was still, push her body out into the deeper water. . . ."

"No, no, no! I tell you, I was nowhere near her the whole day." Metcalfe hesitated. Then: "How do you know she was *pushed* in?"

"The dead may speak," said Old Liz, "though they have no tongues. *She* told me someone pushed her. And *you* have told me who pushed her — you, Owen Metcalfe!"

EDITORS' NOTE: *How did Old Liz know it was murder, not suicide? And how did she know Metcalfe was the murderer? Try to figure it out, before reading the author's solution on the following page. . . .*

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Metcalfe cursed her. "You foul, ranting, toothless devil's hag! Is this your revenge?"

Old Liz touched the body with the stake. "Her bare hand speaks for her, poor lass! Torn and cut, as I cut *my* hands, on this very branch. She didn't throw herself in to die — she was *pushed!* For she tried desperately to pull herself out of the water by this same branch — as *I* did. . . . And her closed fist — what's in it, Owen Metcalfe?"

Her voice lifted in a triumphant chant. "You don't know? You didn't notice what she was doing the very moment you pushed her? What she clutched in her hand — the one thing which proves *you* were here with her? . . . Open her fist, Owen Metcalfe," Old Liz taunted. "Open it, and see. Or look on the fingers of the other hand, and guess as I guessed!"

The man whirled suddenly, to run. Old Liz lifted the stake, spear-like, and hurled it at his legs. He stumbled, tripped — then the crowd was on him, holding him still.

The mother frantically pried open the girl's fist. She held up a ring.

"She took it off to return to him," panted Liz. "How else would it get from her left hand to her right? For whom else would she remove it? And if she'd given it to him earlier, would he not have said so, and shown it to us? But he denied seeing her, all day — twice he denied it! . . . Do you own up now, Owen Metcalfe? Else it's the stake for her and hell-fire, sure, for you!"

The man held her beady stare for a long moment. Then he collapsed, weeping softly.

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you —

the 2nd Hildegarde Withers-John J. Malone detective duet:
Craig Rice's and *Stuart Palmer's* CHERCHEZ LA FRAME

an unusual tale of pure "mystery":
C. S. Forester's THE MAN WHOSE WISHES CAME TRUE

a "new" Continental Op thriller:
Dashiell Hammett's THE BLACK HAT THAT WASN'T THERE

the conclusion of the two-part serial about Hercule Poirot:
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L. A. G. Strong's A MEAL AT PERNOTTI'S
Billy Rose's DETECTIVE STORY

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THUD AND BLUNDER

It takes a really courageous writer to sit down and deliberately create a detective who is supposed to be funny. Not only is one man's humor another man's lament, but too often (if not most often) the trick just doesn't come off — even in the hands of a Wodehouse. And too often (if not most often) the character turns out to be funny for the wrong reasons — in ways the author never originally intended.

The American version of the blundering, bumbling bloodhound is usually, in the short-story field, a correspondence-school graduate — summa-cum-laughter. The two most notable examples are Ellis Parker Butler's Philo Gubb and Percival Wilde's P. Moran (of Shetland Yard). The adventures of the former have little more than old-fashioned nostalgia to delight present-day readers — that, and a genuine historical importance; but the misadventures of P. Moran are modern, streamlined laughing-pieces, full of fun and flavor, with meaty plots and richly rewarding insights into human nature.

On the other hand, what about the British version of the dumb detective? We decided to investigate. In due course we made the acquaintance of W. A. Darlington's Mr. Cronk, and on first reading Chapters XVI and XVII of MR. CRONK'S CASES, *we thought them an amusing account of "dirty work at the villa." But now that we have reread the story, we find ourselves somewhat perplexed. Were we attracted to a subtle parody connotation? Was there something of Hercule Poirot anglicized into the quiet little Mr. Cronk — a faint suggestion, barely perceptible? We leave it to you, with the sad conviction that again that difficult and dangerous experiment has not quite come off . . .*

THE AFFAIR AT THE HOTEL SPLENDIDE

by W. A. DARLINGTON

THE Hotel Splendide received Mr. J. W. Carpenter (*né* Cronk) with outward calm. It allotted him a room with a bath, and proceeded to charge him outrageous prices for their daily use. It fed him sumptuously, and professed itself unobtrusively ready in a score of ways to help that gener-

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ous sum of money from the *Sunday Globe* to melt away.

He went quite unrecognized. Even such visitors as read Cronk's Own Story in the *Sunday Globe* never dreamed of connecting him with "that quiet little man in the corner." A year back he would no doubt have caught the eye as being out of place in such surroundings; but Mr. Cronk the successful detective had learned many things about dress and deportment which Mr. Cronk the solicitor's clerk had never known. Even in this well-dressed crowd he now passed muster.

Accustomed as he was to his own company, he felt neither lonely nor bored; and after his experience at the Tancred Hotel, simply to be part of a crowd that was neither curious nor hostile gave him pleasure. He watched the rich at play, and wove little romances about the younger ones. This was a difficult game, because everybody seemed to be on terms of almost embarrassing intimacy with everybody else, quite regardless of sex or length of acquaintance.

The older English people he found more easy to place. He could guess, with reasonable confidence, at their social standing and their mutual relations. He could also make something of the Americans. The French, on the other hand, he found mysterious in the extreme. These ladies, so very smart and so very highly finished — were they or were they not all that they should be? As for the men, he gave them up altogether. Some were clean-shaven, and were not to be distinguished from Englishmen until they spoke. Others wore dark suits and spade-shaped beards, and were at all times indistinguishable from one another.

At night, Mr. Cronk would watch the couples on the dancing-floor, and would think how pretty the girls looked now that long frocks were back in fashion. There was, he learned, to be a big masked ball in a week or so. He found himself looking forward to that with eagerness. In his quiet way he was enjoying himself hugely.

But though Mr. Cronk's arrival seemed to cause no stir on the surface of life in the Hotel Splendide, it did in fact set in motion some odd cross-currents below the surface. He would have been astonished and shocked, for instance, if he could have looked in at an extraordinary general meeting held in the back premises of the "Chat Noir" a day or two after he came.

The "Chat Noir" was a rather dubious gambling establishment, to which the respectable visitors to Plage-sur-Mer were accustomed to sneak off when they wanted a glimpse of the seamy side of life. But the meeting was held on the top floor, to which the respectable visitors were never allowed to penetrate; and the subject for discussion was "Cronk, And What To Do About Him."

The gathering was a mixed one, socially and sartorially. It included several people whom Mr. Cronk might have recognized as denizens of different spheres in the hotel.

There was the extremely smart

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French Countess, with the blue-black hair and olive skin of the south, who took her meals at the table in the window in conspicuous and haughty solitude. She was now sitting beside, and hobnobbing familiarly with, her own maid. There was also the athletic-looking young Englishman who had signed the register just after Mr. Cronk on his day of arrival. There were two French guests, one anglicized, one spade-bearded. There was a person in a green baize apron, from the knife-and-boot department. There was a waiter. And there was the second supernumerary junior assistant hall-porter.

The rest of the party were recognizable at a glance to any film-fan as thugs, toughs, or Bad Men. Useful fellows, no doubt, for their specialized purpose; but their hair grew too close to the eyebrows for them to appear either decorative or intelligent. Their contributions to the discussion consisted of grunts when they approved of what was being said, and of snarls when they did not.

The discussion was being carried on in English, as all the members of the assemblage were fluent in that tongue — except the low-browed Bad Men, for whose benefit a translation of the main lines of argument into easy French was made from time to time. The young Englishman, addressing the meeting, was being mildly heckled by the knife-and-boot man.

"But are you then well sure that it is Cronk?" asked Knives-and-Boots.

"Of course I am. I saw him at the trial, as close as I am to you. I knew him the instant he stepped on the boat."

There was a heavy silence. The meeting thought hard for a space, and one of the Bad Men spat.

"He is clever, this Cronk?" said one of the Frenchmen.

"As the devil. Clever enough to look a fool. He's deep — that's what he is."

"And you think he's after us?"

"What else? The French police must have sent for him because they are afraid we know all their own agents. There's too much good stuff going to be worn at that masked ball for them to leave anything to chance."

"Well," said the Countess's maid, in a voice of calm authority, "we mustn't leave anything to chance either. You'd better get called suddenly back to England, Charlie. Cronk may have recognized you. I'll send for François instead."

The Englishman looked mutinous for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well," he said. "I suppose it's safer."

"And meanwhile," the maid went on, "we must find out what Cronk *is* here for. He may simply be having a holiday. If so, it would be madness to do anything that might arouse his suspicions. So I suggest that Louise have a go at him."

"Me?" asked the Countess, in faint protest.

"You, my dear," said the maid firmly. "And then we'll meet again and discuss what's to be done."

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Here one of the Bad Men snarled. The sound was understood by all present to be a suggestion.

"No," said the maid severely. "None of your tricks, Alphonse, unless it is necessary. That's all for today."

The meeting dispersed as unobtrusively as it had collected.

Next morning, to his chagrin, Mr. Cronk committed a social blunder. He was crossing the lounge, and the French Countess (she whose aloof air he had been admiring from afar, in his humble way) was surveying her immaculate self in a long mirror. As Mr. Cronk passed behind her, she turned away from the glass and stepped back, with the result that he bumped into her and actually knocked her off her balance.

She staggered and only saved herself from falling by clutching at the back of a chair. Scarlet with shame, he stammered apologies. But the lady bore him no ill-will. She smiled, bowed graciously, and passed on her way with the unruffled serenity of the born aristocrat, leaving Mr. Cronk reflecting what a nice woman she must be.

When she appeared at lunch, he was admiring her stately progress up the room, when suddenly she caught his eye and gave him a smile of recognition. It was so fleeting an expression that he could hardly believe it had ever existed, yet so intimate and friendly that it warmed his heart.

At dinner she swept in looking so wonderful that Mr. Cronk was abashed, and kept his eyes on his soup plate, pretending not to have seen her. But afterwards, on the terrace, where he was drinking coffee, she came and ensconced herself in a chair near him. She had evidently not noticed that there was anybody in Mr. Cronk's shadowy corner, for she did not throw a glance in his direction.

Now he could gaze without embarrassment, for she was full in his view. He did so. The night was warm and the terrace sheltered; and after a few moments she slipped off her wrap and threw it over the back of her chair. Mr. Cronk admired her poise even more than before.

A waiter brought coffee. She sipped it delicately. Then she produced a gold cigarette-case from her bag, took a cigarette, and put it to her lips.

The assured grace of her movements fascinated Mr. Cronk.

But now a slight frown appeared between her perfect brows. She opened her bag, peered into it, shut it again, and looked about her helplessly. Mr. Cronk was puzzled for a second. Then came enlightenment: she had no matches.

There were matches on all the tables about them, but she seemed not to realize this. Mr. Cronk's hand sought the pocket of his dinner-jacket and found his nice new lighter. Dare he come to the rescue of beauty in distress, without an introduction? Could he bring himself to risk a snub? Might she not suspect, after this morning, that he was trying

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to scrape acquaintance with her? As he sat in agony of indecision, the Countess herself caught sight of him, and solved his difficulty.

"Excuse me," she said, in English which had only the faintest trace of a foreign accent, "but have you, by good fortune, a match?"

Mr. Cronk leaped forward, produced his lighter, lit it in trembling haste, and held it out. The Countess leaned forward with her cigarette and, steadying herself with a touch of her soft fingers on his hand, obtained her light.

"Thank you so very much," she said.

Mr. Cronk put the lighter back into his pocket, achieved an awkward bow, and was turning away when she gave him a friendly smile and said:

"Will you not stop and talk to me?"

And Mr. Cronk found himself sitting at her table, and heard a voice which he hardly dared believe was his own inviting her to drink a liqueur with him, and calmly giving the order to the waiter.

His apprehension lest he might not know how to talk to a foreign noblewoman soon proved groundless, for the Countess, belying her aloof appearance, did most of the talking. It appeared that she was lonely, having found nobody in the hotel whom she considered worth talking to until Fate had willed that Mr. Cronk should collide with her.

Mr. Cronk preened himself in the semi-darkness. He had thought already that his expensive dinner-jacket had given him an unwonted air of smartness. Now he knew it.

"How strange!" said the Countess suddenly, with a laugh. "Here we are, old friends, and we do not know one another's names. You are Mr. — Mr. —— ?"

"Cr — Carpenter!" said Mr. Cronk, remembering only just in time.

"Then that is another strange thing. I seem to know your face. Yet I have never met a Mr. Carpenter. Have we, perhaps, passed one another in some crowd, or at some party? Deauville, Biarritz, Cannes — have you been there lately?"

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Cronk, and added with daring gallantry, "and I am sure that if I had seen you I should not have forgotten it."

"Perhaps," suggested the Countess, knitting her brow, "I have seen your photograph. Has it been lately in the papers?"

She spoke with the assured air of one well used to seeing her friends' photographs in the papers. Mr. Cronk, glancing warily about to make sure that nobody else was within earshot, resolved to give her his confidence. It would be safe with her.

"Well," he admitted, "as a matter of fact, it has."

"Carpenter? Carpenter?" The Countess searched her memory. "I read your English papers every day, but I do not remember . . ."

"Well, as a matter of fact my name's not Carpenter. It's — er — Cronk."

"Cronk?" The Countess sat up straight. "But surely . . . yes . . .

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now I remember! You are the so clever detective who . . ."

"Please, *please!*" Mr. Cronk restrained her. "Don't raise your voice. Nobody must know. There's a special reason. You will keep it to yourself, won't you?"

The Countess drew herself up.

"What is it that I should tell?" she asked loftily. "Besides, I am leaving tomorrow."

"Leaving?" asked Mr. Cronk.

"Alas, yes. We meet only to part, my friend. Life is like that. But, who knows, we may meet again."

She rose and pulled her wrap about her. Mr. Cronk felt that he ought to kiss her hand, but did not trust himself so far as to try. He bowed, much less awkwardly than before, and watched her with admiration as she swept along the terrace.

Arrived in her room, the Countess rang for her maid. Then, without waiting for the girl to arrive, she took off her frock and her stockings, put on the towel wrap and the rope-soled shoes she used for bathing, and began to put her finery carefully away.

A quick double-knock sounded on the door.

"*Entrez!*" called the Countess.

The maid appeared in the doorway.

"Madame?" she enquired respectfully, for the benefit of anybody who might be within earshot.

Then she closed the door, and her manner changed. She sauntered across to the dressing-table, selected a cigarette from the Countess's gold case, and lit it. Then she sat on the bed.

"Any luck?" she asked.

The Countess, on her knees before a chest of drawers, glanced up.

"It *is* Cronk, and he is up to some game."

"Why? Did he suspect you?"

"Not he. You should have seen him. He got the thrill of his life."

"Well, what did he tell you?"

"That he has a special reason for not wanting it known who he is."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"All right, my dear, all right. I only wondered if you'd been able to make him talk a bit more."

"I couldn't, without asking questions; and that might have put him wise to me."

The maid looked thoughtful.

"Are you sure he wasn't wise to you? He's deep, you know."

"If he had been, would he have given me his name?"

"He might. You never know."

"Anyhow, to be on the safe side, I told him I was leaving tomorrow. I hope that won't be awkward for you. But seeing you sent Charlie home just in case . . ."

"No — quite right. All my arrangements are finished. Thank you, Louise. You've managed very well."

The Countess was now sitting up to the dressing table, where her hands were busy with the lustrous blue-black hair.

"Well," she said in a sudden tone of discontent, "I hope next time you'll let me have a proper maid. It's bad enough turning myself out like a

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millionairess — and this wig's the last straw."

She twitched the smooth dark hair off as she spoke, revealing a mop of fair curls beneath.

"Don't be absurd, my dear," returned the maid with firmness. "The fewer people that know anything, the better. Besides, you've nothing to do all day but turn yourself out. It's I who have the really hard work. The only rest I get is when I'm up here supposed to be looking after you."

The Countess laughed shortly.

"Why not?" she said. "You get your reward. Your share's twice mine."

"And quite right too, considering I planned the whole thing."

"There's nothing much in that," objected the Countess, now in a thoroughly pettish humor. "It's only going to be an ordinary hold-up."

"Yes. But who found out that Mrs. Harrison was coming for the dance? And who knew that where Mrs. Harrison goes, half a dozen other rich American women will follow?"

"Oh, all right! I'm sorry. I suppose I'm tired or something."

"Don't mention it, my dear. Now, if we're off tomorrow, you'd better pack. And put that wig on. We mustn't take risks. Somebody might break in — you never know. You may have encouraged Cronk too far, for instance. If he tried his luck and found *you* here instead of his Countess, the game would be up."

"He won't," said the Countess.

"You never know. So put it on."

Meekly, the Countess obeyed. But Mr. Cronk did not "try his luck." He was asleep, and dreaming (like the individual in the song) that he dwelt in marble halls, with vassals and serfs at his side.

Next day, the table in the window was empty, and Mr. Cronk, for the first time, felt lonely.

He looked about him at a concourse of perfect strangers absorbing their large continental luncheon. Yesterday, all he had wanted was to sit in a corner and watch them. Now, he was unhappy because not a soul among them was interested in himself.

And then suddenly, among the concourse, he found one person who was taking a very great interest in him.

This was one of the prettiest of the girls he had seen dancing in the hotel in the evenings. She was fair, and (as all such girls seemed to be nowadays) she was tall and very slim. He had noticed her before, chiefly because she had a most individual voice which, whenever she raised it above a low conversational tone, had an astonishing carrying power. It was very clear in tone and conveyed an extraordinary sense of enjoyment in whatever she happened to be doing.

She was gazing in a fascinated way at Mr. Cronk, and had evidently just made some remark about him to her escort — the extremely fit-looking young man who was always about with her. As Mr. Cronk glanced up, they both dropped their eyes and appeared extremely disconcerted.

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Almost immediately afterwards they rose to go. Mr. Cronk wondered why the girl had stared like that. Had she, like the Countess, remembered his face from a newspaper photograph?

As soon as he was outside the restaurant, the young man asked his companion the same question.

"I say, Pat, what *was* the excitement about? Why did you stare at the little man? I didn't know which way to look when he caught us."

"He had a crumb on his lip."

"But, my dear girl . . ."

"And he looked lonely and pathetic. I was just thinking . . ."

"That you'd like to adopt him, I suppose!"

The girl laughed.

"Something like that. And then he went and caught me. Let's have our coffee here on the terrace, shall we?"

She picked up an English weekly paper, and dropped into a chair. The young man became totally immersed in a copy of *La Vie Parisienne*.

Suddenly the girl exclaimed, "Why, good heavens, here he is!"

"Who?" said a preoccupied voice.

"Our little man."

"Well, don't stare at him again."

"I don't mean himself, silly. I mean here's his picture in the paper. And Philip — he's — *he's a famous detective!!*"

"What?"

The young man dropped *La Vie*, leaned across, and studied Mr. Cronk's portrait — a much better one than any that had appeared in the daily Press. He burst into laughter.

"Poor lonely little fellow with a crumb on his lip," he mocked. "And he turns out . . . Pat, you'll have to keep your maternal instincts in better order."

"Look out — here he comes!"

Mr. Cronk, still a prey to gloom, wandered out on to the terrace and sat down. After a moment he became aware that he had taken a seat opposite the fair girl and her escort; and further, that they were studying him surreptitiously under cover of their magazines.

Mr. Cronk did not look up again till he had finished his coffee. Then he threw a quick, casual glance at the girl. Her head was still bent over her paper, but he was in time to catch the flash of her eyes as they dropped to the page.

"I say, Philip," she said, under her breath, "he's watching us. D'you think he suspects us?"

"How can he?"

"Well, perhaps the hotel's employing him, and he's noticed that we're not quite . . ."

The young man looked serious.

"By Jove, it *is* possible! Because there's no doubt about it, Pat — what we're doing is criminal, if you come to think of it."

The girl stole another glance at Mr. Cronk, who looked away a second too late.

"He's still at it," she said. "Philip, I don't like it. Let's go and bathe, shall we? And if he goes on watching us, we'll *know!*"

They departed in confusion.

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Mr. Cronk, wondering what could be afoot, drifted across the terrace to the chairs they had occupied, and glanced idly at the paper the girl had been reading. It was lying open as she had dropped it, and the page showed an excellent likeness of himself.

Evidently they knew him for what he was. But why should a nice-looking English boy and girl, with an air of wealth and well-being such as these had, be perturbed at finding a detective their fellow-guest? Were they perhaps not all they seemed? Mr. Cronk sighed heavily. He was learning by sad experience to distrust everybody.

And yet he had a strong reluctance to suspect these two. They were so well turned out — so clean!

After all, there might be some reason for their peculiar behavior which he had not thought of. He decided that he must keep an eye on them — without, of course, allowing them to suspect that he had even noticed them — and that in the meantime they were entitled to the benefit of the doubt.

This settled, he leaned back in his chair and sunned himself. And a clear young voice floated up from the garden below him.

"If that little detective *is* here on business," it said, "I bet he is after us."

An indistinguishable murmur came in answer.

"Well, anyhow," went on the voice, "you looked the picture of guilt yourself."

Mr. Cronk peeped cautiously over the terrace balustrade. It was as he feared. The speakers were the tall, fair girl and her escort. They had now turned down the path which led to the bottom of the hotel garden and to the beach, and the girl's voice was no longer audible.

But he had heard enough. Here was no more surmise. Here was proof. These two pleasant young people were up to something which it was Mr. Cronk's duty to discover. And suddenly it was borne in on Mr. Cronk what that something was.

The fancy-dress ball, to which, it was rumored, all sorts of wealthy and fashionable people were coming! They were going to make a haul under cover of the masquerade. He must set himself to prevent them.

And so began a perfect orgy of vigilance in Plage-sur-Mer. Mr. Cronk, intent on his two young suspects, never dreamed that he was himself under constant surveillance in the hotel, or that when he took his walks abroad, muscular but inarticulate men with no foreheads prowled after him. The only thing he did notice was that one of the spade-bearded Frenchmen, meeting him in a deserted passage, looked at him in a meaning and (Mr. Cronk felt) a sinister way, and made an odd gesture of the hand. But bearded Frenchmen always had a slightly sinister aspect to Mr. Cronk. And all Frenchmen gesticulated by habit. He thought no more of the incident.

Pursuing his investigations, he soon made a significant discovery.

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The young couple were not staying in the hotel at all.

They lunched at it, dined at it, danced at it, and used its bathing-place. They behaved in every way like ordinary guests. But when a change of clothes was necessary, or night fell, they slipped off unobtrusively down an unfrequented road.

Along this road Mr. Cronk tracked them. He was now a much more experienced shadower than of old, and managed to keep them in sight till they reached a lonely middle-sized villa standing in its own grounds just outside the village. The house was shuttered and had its blinds drawn, and was to all appearances quite uninhabited. He watched the young couple slip furtively in at the garden gate. Then, through the hedge, he saw them let themselves into the house by a side-door.

He continued his stroll along the road, the very picture of a casual holiday-maker out for a constitutional, and sat down on a sand dune near by. After a while the suspects came out again in evening clothes and, letting themselves out at the garden gate with the same stealthy air as before, took the road back to the hotel.

Mr. Cronk made a sudden bold resolution. There were no other houses near, and nobody seemed to be about. He would search the villa.

With infinite caution he crept in at the garden gate, found the side-door, and turned the handle. The door was unlocked and swung inwards at his touch. He listened tensely, but there was not a sound. He stepped inside.

It took him only a few moments to confirm his worst suspicions. The house belonged, it appeared, to one Lord Leconbridge. Only two of the rooms — the big bedroom at the front of the house and the kitchen — bore marks of occupation. The rest was untouched. The rooms lay dust-sheeted and ghostly behind their closed shutters.

Whoever these young people might be, and whatever their intentions, it was plain that they had no right to be living where they were living. He must get back to the hotel, and think this out. He let himself out again by the side-door.

At that moment his heart leaped with pure terror. He heard — or could have sworn that he heard — a creak from the garden gate.

He dodged behind a bush, but no other sound broke the evening calm. At last, taking courage, he tiptoed along the path, reached the gate, and craned a cautious neck over it. But there was nobody to be seen along the road in either direction.

Telling himself that he was growing fanciful, he returned to the hotel.

Two days before the hotel dance a meeting was convened at the rooms at the "Chat Noir," where the Cronk Menace was discussed in detail.

There was now no doubt in the mind of anybody present that Cronk was a very dangerous man. It had been established by the "Countess"

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that he was in Plage-sur-Mer for a purpose. It was now established, furthermore, that his spies, accomplices, assistants — call them what you will — were the two young English people, apparently so harmless, who were to be seen about the hotel at all hours, though they were not staying in it; and that their headquarters was the empty villa on the outskirts of the town, which belonged to Milord Leconbridge.

Last night Cronk had actually visited the villa, choosing his time carefully so as not to meet his assistants personally. Doubtless his object had been to give them their orders; but the subtlety of his methods was proved by the fact that an immediate and intensive search of the villa had yielded no sign of any message. Probably some clever code of signaling had been devised.

Everything in the villa had been left untouched to avoid suspicion. And now the question was: what next?

A gray-haired American lady, one of a batch of tourists who had come over for the day from a neighboring and cheaper resort, was in the chair. She looked like a schoolmistress from the Middle West, but her voice was the voice of the late Countess's late maid.

"Have these people," she asked briskly, looking round the table, "been in touch with any other visitors?"

The meeting shook its heads.

"Good. If they're working alone the thing's easy. The two young ones must go to their villa in the evening to dress for the masquerade. We can settle their hash then. As for Cronk, he'd better be — er — removed at about the same time. If he's in the hotel that'll be your job, Jacques." Knives-and-Boots gave a nod. "You're off duty then. You can hide in the cupboard. But I think he will not go to his room. We know that he has no costume for the masquerade, unless he goes to the villa to change. He will hardly do that, I think."

"He may," put in the extra hall-porter. "His method is always to do the thing that seems wrong."

"Well, let us hope he does," said the ex-maid with unction. "We can then put him with his friends. After that we all know what to do. I will give the signal, as near 11:30 as can be. Any questions? No? Good — then I will rejoin my party, if you will excuse me."

On the day of the dance Philip and Pat decided to take things easy, in preparation for a strenuous evening. After their customary morning bathe they ordered drinks and dawdled over them on the terrace.

This brought great relief to Mr. Cronk, who was able to post himself near them under the screen of some ornamental vegetation in pots, and make believe he was reading a book. The crooks in their turn, having the enemy collected into one spot, were able to relax their vigilance.

From time to time Mr. Cronk could

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hear the clear, penetrating voice of the girl Pat. For the most part she uttered nothing but casual and lazy comment on the weather, or the passers-by. But just before lunch he overheard a snatch of conversation which gave him one more proof, if such were needed, that she and her young husband were not all that they should be.

"I say, Philip," she exclaimed, in the tone of one uttering an unpleasant truth, "has it struck you that this show tonight's going to be a bit risky?"

An interrogative murmur from Philip.

"Because it's a grand affair with people coming from all parts. There's certain to be someone who knows us. I don't mean at night — we'll be masked. But I think we'd better not have dinner here. How about having a scratch meal at the villa, and dressing up afterwards?"

Those few chance-heard sentences settled the day's arrangements for everybody. All afternoon Mr. Cronk (and the crooks) took their ease. After dinner Mr. Cronk (and the crooks) set out for the villa.

Mr. Cronk was nervous, but quite determined. He entered the garden without hesitation, and walked into the house unheralded even by a knock.

Philip and Pat, sitting at the kitchen table over their scratch meal, sprang up in alarm. Mr. Cronk, abashed but still purposeful, saw that the girl had on a dressing-gown and very little else. Philip was in tennis flannels.

"You!" said Philip blankly.

"Then you *were* after us!" said Pat.

Mr. Cronk, overjoyed at obtaining a confession of guilt so easily, gave a portentous nod.

"I know all about you!" he said.

"Oh, *Philip*," Pat began; but the boy silenced her with a wave of the hand.

"Well," he said defiantly. "What if you do?"

"Only that I'm going to see that it goes no further."

"I should like to punch your head," Philip said in a menacing tone.

"No, Philip — no. It would be an awful mistake!" Pat remonstrated swiftly.

Mr. Cronk also thought it would be a mistake. He backed away nervously, and determined on a bluff.

"Better be careful," he said. "My — my men are outside."

And then, as if to make his words come horribly, terrifyingly true, the door flew open and the room was suddenly full of large unpleasant men. Half a dozen of them seemed to jump on Mr. Cronk simultaneously, knocking all the wind out of his body. The world disappeared and was replaced by constellations of beautiful stars.

When he was able to think coherently once more, and to take stock of his surroundings, he found that he was most efficiently and thoroughly bound to a large armchair in one of the dust-sheeted sitting-rooms. A gag which felt like iron and

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tasted like mud was clamped securely between his jaws.

Gradually he got his brain into some sort of order. Who were those large unpleasant men, and why had they done this to him? The answer came only too plainly. They were the myrmidons of Pat and Philip. He had been tricked, and probably at this very moment his deceivers were on their way to despoil the guests of the Hotel Splendide.

An attempt to struggle out of his bonds proved a hideous failure. It caused a sharp pang to shoot right across his body, and what should have been a shriek of anguish was smothered in the muddy taste of the gag. Moreover, his chair gave a dangerous lurch and threatened to fall over, and add the peril of concussion to his other ills. There seemed to be nothing for it but to wait and hope for rescue.

Yet what hope was there? Once they had made their haul, the bandits would certainly not return here to set him free. The house was empty and remote. He might lie here helpless for days. Weeks. Even months.

An imaginary newspaper headline, "Gruesome Discovery in French Villa," floated before his mind's eye.

Then, miraculously, a motor-car was heard outside. For a moment the beam from its headlights threw strange shadows across the room. It drew up outside the house. Voices were heard, and footsteps on the garden path. Then the front door was opened.

Mr. Cronk heaved at his bonds in a desperate attempt to give some signal to the people below. Who they might be he neither knew nor cared. So long as they would release him, they could do what they liked with him afterwards. They could now be heard moving downstairs.

Suddenly, Mr. Cronk knew what he must do. Setting his teeth, and nerving himself to the horrid deed, he flung his weight backwards. The chair swayed, hung precariously on a dead centre, and toppled over with a reverberating crash. Mr. Cronk saw some more constellations, followed by complete darkness.

When he came to, he was lying on the floor. His bonds and the gag were gone, and he was being contemplated with interest by a young man in flowing white draperies and a halo.

"Wh-what are you?" gasped Mr. Cronk, horrified.

"I'm an archangel," said the young man. "What are you?"

But Mr. Cronk only closed his eyes.

"Here — I say — hold up!" said the archangel. He raised his voice. "Hurry up with that water, Joyce!"

"In a minute," said a pleasant contralto from outside. "I've found two more in the bedroom."

"Good God!" said the archangel. And though it was more or less the kind of thing a real archangel might be expected to say, there was something unarchangelic in the tone. Mr. Cronk decided that he was not dead after all, and opened his eyes.

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"Here they are," said the rich contralto. And a young woman in the robes of ancient Greece entered, ushering Philip and Pat, both looking exhausted and bedraggled.

Astonishment gave Mr. Cronk his tongue.

"Aren't you — aren't you robbing the hotel?" he asked.

Philip in his turn looked amazed.

"Why should we?"

"I thought you were," explained Mr. Cronk weakly.

"Well, we weren't."

"Excuse me," said the archangel politely. "But do you mind telling me what you *were* doing? My name's Leconbridge, by the way. The little bit of old Greece is my wife. It's our house."

Mr. Cronk gave another groan. Events were moving too fast for him in his half-dazed condition.

Lord Leconbridge looked from Pat to Philip.

"We're having a honeymoon," said Philip doggedly.

"What — all of you?"

"No — us," said Pat, with an explanatory gesture. She addressed herself to Lady Leconbridge. "I know it's awful, and you can put us in prison if you like. But we knew the house was empty, and we've been awfully careful of your things."

"But why did you do it?" asked his wife.

"Partly economy. Partly for fun. We couldn't afford to stay at the hotel more than a week, and we didn't want to be branded everywhere as newly-married. And besides," continued Pat, taking heart of grace from the fact that the Leconbridges seemed interested rather than angry, "I wanted a chance to get used to my funny name."

"Meaning?"

"It's Palk, you see. Pat Palk. Mrs. Philip Palk. It's a fine old family, and all that. But I didn't want to have to spend my time while I was new to it, and all self-conscious, explaining to people that it isn't spelt P-O-R-K."

Lady Leconbridge gurgled suddenly.

"Palk?" she said. "Then haven't we been staying with your aunt?"

"Yes," said Philip simply. "That's how we knew your house was empty."

"And him?" The archangel indicated Mr. Cronk, who had lapsed into a sort of coma.

"Oh, that's Mr. Cronk, the famous detective."

"*That?*"

"Yes. You know. The man who found out that smuggling business."

"Good Lord! Who'd have thought it? And who tied you up?"

"I don't know. Some men. Hotel robbers, it looks like. Ask him."

But no sense could for the moment be got out of Mr. Cronk. When asked who had attacked him, he shook his head.

"Nobody," he groaned. "I don't know. It's all a mistake."

They looked at each other in perplexity.

"One thing's clear," said Lord Leconbridge at last. "There's some

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funny business planned for this ball, and I must get across at once and stop it if I can. Got anything on worth stealing, Joyce?"

"No, darling."

"Then come on."

"I say — you must take us," implored Pat.

"But you aren't dressed."

"It won't take us a minute. I'm Cinderella and he's a sort of student."

"Well, hurry up. And we ought to take old what's-his-name, in case he's fit to give evidence. Isn't there a fancy dress that'll do for him?"

"There's your old Pierrot kit, Freddy. It's put away on the top of my wardrobe," said Lady Leconbridge. "Come along, Mr. Cronk."

She went out. And Mr. Cronk, still too dazed to protest, followed her.

Mr. Cronk had seldom felt less gay than when he followed the other members of his party down the passage leading to the Hotel Splendide's magnificent ballroom.

He was still half dazed, and his head ached dismally. He was wearing fancy dress for the first time in his life, and it did not fit him. And somewhere at the back of his mind was the dull conviction that he had just made a fool of himself, and was now going to be forced into doing so again in public.

Just outside the ballroom these mixed feelings culminated in a wave of actual physical nausea. Mr. Cronk dropped into a chair and put his head into his hands. Consequently, he did not see his companions pause in astonishment at the doorway, nor hear Lord Leconbridge's exclamation:

"Good Lord! The police! We're too late."

For the dance was in a state of suspended animation. Gendarmes were on guard at the doors. The dancers, with their masks off, were standing about in groups.

Two groups caught Lord Leconbridge's eye. In one, which consisted of the famous Mrs. Harrison and her gilded following, half a dozen millionairesses were holding an agitated census of their own and each other's jewelry. The other group contained no face that he knew, but was noticeable because of the odd assortment of people that it contained. Some were in fancy dress, some in ordinary clothes. One wore a green baize apron, and one the resplendent uniform of a hall-porter. And suddenly he noticed that the members of this group were all handcuffed together in pairs.

"I wonder if the thieves got away?" said the clear, resonant voice of Pat, on whom the handcuffs had not yet made an impression.

At the words a little Frenchman — the spade-bearded kind — swung round and came towards them.

"Who are you?" he said sharply. "And what you know of t'ieves, yes?"

Obeying his gesture the party unmasked. The Frenchman glanced at them with suspicion, and addressed himself to the leader.

"You tell, please, yes?"

"I am Lord Leconbridge. I have

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just found an English detective, Mr. Cronk, gagged and bound in my villa."

The Frenchman's face showed lively concern.

"Is he blest, the good Cronk?"

"Blest?" repeated Lady Leconbridge.

"*Blessé* — hurt!" her husband translated in a swift undertone. "Yes, monsieur. He is a little blest in the head. But he'll be all right."

The Frenchman bowed.

"I am glad," he said formally, then suddenly burst into enthusiastic speech. "Ah! But 'e is clevaire, zis Cronk! Figure yourself, Mister, I am pretend to be one of ze robbaires. Zey tell me zat ze so famous Cronk is what you call on ze job. I tip 'im ze vink and make a sign when we meet, but 'e look along ze nose, and I t'ink 'e not understand. Like all ze English, 'e pretend to be more stupider zan 'e is not. But 'e understand ver' well. 'E make ze mystère. 'E make it zat zese bandits zey give attention to 'im, and leave me to make my little plans. I salute Cronk, me. 'E 'as dragged across my traces what you call ze crimson kipper!"

"I don't," murmured Philip Palk. "But I always will in future."

"*Et voila* — I capture ze lot."

"It seems to me, Lord Leconbridge," Mrs. Harrison said, "that we owe a great deal to this Mr. Cronk. Where is he, anyway?"

"Er — somewhere about. Ah! Here he is."

And Mr. Cronk made his entrance.

It was not an impressive entrance. He was still wearing his mask; his Pierrot suit was many sizes too large; his knees were collapsing under him; his head was splitting; and he had only the very vaguest notion what was going on.

"Ah! *Cher collègue!*" exclaimed the spade-bearded Frenchman — the same one who had looked so sinister when they had met in the hotel — and kissed him on both cheeks. Utterly astonished and profoundly shocked, Mr. Cronk recoiled and looked about him, to find himself being gazed at from all sides with curiosity and admiration.

He was, though he had no notion why, once more a popular hero. Everybody seemed agreed on that point — except that, from the other side of the room, a manifest hussy with blonde curls was eyeing him malignantly. And in a flash of realisation, he recognized her for his exotic Countess, and saw the gyves on her wrist.

Mr. Cronk's sorely battered brain reeled afresh. Why were these people admiring him? Who was this osculatory Frenchman? What had he done to the Countess that she should hate him so? Why was she so changed? Why the handcuffs? What did it all, or any of it, mean? And what was he expected to do?

There was only one way of coping with a situation so complicated, and outraged Nature intervened to see that he took that way.

He fainted.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Stewart C. Bailey's "Because of Soney" is one of the eight "first stories" which won special awards in our 1949 contest. It is the story of a hard, lunchroom waitress and a weak college graduate who, if you will pardon the expression, "fall in love." But beware of the quotation marks: you will find little sweetness and light in this love affair. The same quality of paradox dominates the author's whole technical approach: here is a tale at once tough and sentimental, at once hardboiled and softbaked, at once dream-filled and ironic . . .

Mr. Bailey was graduated in 1948 from Franklin College, Franklin, Indiana, where he majored in Journalism. He has taken post-graduate courses at Butler University and the University of Arizona. But his observation of people, the way they think and act, what makes them tick, must have derived chiefly from his newspaper work — he was a reporter for, among other papers, "The Indianapolis Star." At the present time he is Information Secretary of the Marion County Tuberculosis Association, in Indianapolis, and the man who gravitates to that kind of job must have a heart in his chest, and that heart will show in his work.

BECAUSE OF SONEY

by STEWART C. BAILEY

I HATED having to slug her. But I had to — so I could write this down and you'd know it was all because of Soney. Not me.

The snow's nearly up to the windows now and no matter how tight I roll them it sifts through. And it's cold. I just felt Soney's wrist and it's like ice, even to my fingers. Her body lies on the back seat, and maybe it's dead already and maybe it isn't. It doesn't make any difference whether she dies now or an hour from now.

I have to keep feeding the fire all the time because paper burns fast and doesn't give much heat. And there isn't much left.

Soney's dreams are burning. The dreams that were mine too, because Soney made them mine. And the dreams are burning up and will last maybe an hour longer — probably less. Till I can write this down on the stationary Soney cadged from the hotel in Kansas City. And whoever digs us out, please send it on to my friends back home. . . .

It never pays to go into a rat-race like *The Triple T*. But that night I had to talk to someone. I sat down at

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the bar and ordered a beer, and after I drank off a few, I started looking around.

In one booth there was a character in a black shirt. With two babes. Both very neat. And the one that sat by herself had on levis and a plaid shirt. Blonde hair that fell to her shoulders and sharp features.

While I watched, the blonde got up and walked past me at the bar to request a number from the groaner. She swaggered when she walked and she exchanged fast conversation with the sleazy people who sat at the tables along her route.

And she bumped me slightly as she passed.

So when she got back to her two friends, I drank off my beer and walked back. She looked up at me with an unfriendly face. It threw me a little off-guard, but I was getting full of beer so I said, "Howdy, friends," and swept off my hat with a flourish.

The blonde looked me over and moved over to the inside of the booth.

"You wanta sit down?" she said.

"If you want me to."

"No one's stopping you," she said. And then she yelled at a sloppy, pudgy waitress who was passing, "Four beers, Mary."

And I took my wallet out of my coat pocket and pulled out a ten. And I had someone to talk to.

That's how I met Soney.

"Do you work for a living?" I said.

"Work?" she said. "What's that?" Then she lit one of my cigarettes and said to the couple who sat across the table from us, "This character wants to know if I work. Do you call slingin' hash work?"

She half-turned in the booth and looked me over again. She was looking at the clothes, and my hands that didn't have black nails like the hands of the man in the black shirt.

"You jerks," she said. "You jerks that went to college on your old man and then knock down easy jobs. And then slum around. You jerks," and then she drank off her beer. *Chug-a-lug.* She was drunk.

After that, the evening didn't go very good. Soney got nastier and nastier. I bought four more beers and four more beers. But her girl friend told me where they worked — *Joe's Lunch* — as we stood out in the winter wind after the tavern closed and Soney was telling me where I could go.

I'd gone in *The Triple T* that night to find someone to talk to. Because I was new in town, on a new job. I met a drunken blonde and I forgot her — figuring I'd never see her again.

But a week later I was making a call out in the industrial center. It was after five when I left the plant with an order and as I walked to my car I passed a greasy-looking restaurant. Its windows were all steamy and you could barely see the sign that said: *Joe's Lunch.*

I was in my car and had the engine going before I remembered. And like a real, twenty-four carat sap I got out and went back. I did have to eat some

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place, that's true, but not in the place Soney worked.

It was she who served me. Brought me the roast beef and potatoes and boiled cabbage. It was Soney in a soiled blue uniform. I knew I'd made a mistake. But I said:

"Hi, Soney. Remember me?"

A smile brightened her sharp-featured face and she said, "Why, sure! Sure, I remember you. You're the college boy I insulted the other night. In *The Triple T.*"

She put down my bread and uncolored margarine and a funny half-crooked smile twisted her mouth.

"I guess I was pretty drunk," she said. "I guess I ought to apologize to you." She took a cigarette out of my pack that lay on the counter and lit it. "Say, what is your name anyway?"

"Parker Amhurst," I said.

"A real fancy name," she said laughing. "Ain't there a junior or a second or a third on the end of it? Parker Amhurst, II, sounds even better."

"You're right," I said, "there used to be a II on the name, but I haven't used it since 1929. When my father died."

Soney sneered. "1929, hunh? So I was right. You sure your old man just died? He didn't decide to jump out the window? How about that, Parker Amhurst, the second?"

I sat there eating, and took it. And I watched the way the light from the unshaded bulb above her head made gold glints in her hair. And I knew right then I'd be taking her stuff for a long time. If I could just be around her and watch her hair under an unshaded light bulb . . .

She sauntered off through the swinging door in the back, while I finished eating. The cashier was taking my money when Soney came back, wearing a fringed leather jacket over the levis and plaid shirt and boots she had been wearing that first night in *The Triple T.*

Walking close to me so that we touched, she looked up and said, "You wanta date me?"

"Naturally," I said. "When?"

"What do you mean when?" she said. "I wanta date, I want it right now. You got your car here?"

"Right outside," I said, and I took her arm in the fringed leather jacket. And we were off. To *The Triple T* and to other joints.

Soney lived in a furnished room in the boarding-house area. Alone. She liked it okay, she said. Because it only cost her three dollars a week. Which was too much for a working gal who made fifteen dollars a week and few tips. In 1948. But some mornings she didn't feel like going to work, she said, and Joe Photopolus who owned *Joe's Lunch* didn't care. She got along — barely. She liked her beer, but there were always guys that would buy that. Like me.

On the walls of her room she had pasted pictures of horses and guys in western clothes. And Soney on horses. And one photochrome from a magazine showing an Arizona ranch with purple mountains in the distance.

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I lit cigarettes for us and said, "That picture of the ranch. I wish you'd take it down. It breaks my heart. Being here."

Soney's voice had softened. "What's it like out there, Park — I mean, what's it really like? Is it like in that picture and like it is in the movies? Is it really so wonderful?"

"Even better than that," I said. "You can't take a picture of a western night on the desert or in the canyon with the stars close, like they are. And a camp fire. You can't photograph magic. Thinking about it makes you want to cry, when you're here in this jerk town and can't leave."

"Why can't you go back, Park? You make good money, you've got a college education. You could go out there if you really wanted to. God, what I wouldn't do to be able to! But I couldn't even pay the bus fare."

"A man can't make a living out there," I said, "unless he's inside looking out. Too many people have the same idea. Labor's cheap. I've got a good job here — with a future. I'd be silly to leave it and go back there to starve. Never again — until I'm in the money. And that will probably be a long time."

"Money, Park. Money money money. I've never been able to do anything I wanted to because of that stuff. Let's you and I rob a bank and get enough to blow this town. And its smog and its stinking rooms like this. And let's us go out west and buy a ranch. And horses. Like I've always wanted."

"Sure, honey," I said, "we'll get ourselves fifty thousand and buy a ranch. But in Mexico. It's much better. Land's cheaper — so's labor. You could live like a king forever on fifty thousand. Let's rob a bank. You and I."

And then Soney wanted to know about Mexico. So I told her about the border towns I'd been in. Nogales and Jaurez and Tiajuana. And the time I went down to Acapulco. And Monterey. The bright sun. The tacos. The little niños who tag along behind you, and how you feel funny because they make you feel so important. And how they really talk like they do in "Gordo" — pronounced "Gortho."

"Let's rob a bank, darling," she said, and kissed me . . .

When I checked with the office the next day, just before noon, there was a number for me to call. It was *The Triple T* — so I asked for Soney. She wanted me to come on over quick; she had big news.

She was seated by herself in a booth and she wasn't wearing her levis. She had on a dress and she looked swell. She had a package on the seat beside her and as soon as I sat down and ordered, she had it open. It was a slate-gray uniform.

"See that, Park," she said. "I'm an elevator operator now." Then she smiled — big. "In the Plaza Trust, no less. Plush, hunh?"

I didn't know what to say. She seemed so pleased with herself. And just because of landing a job as an elevator operator. Maybe thirty bucks

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a week. It made me swallow. Then I said:

"Congratulations. You should look neat in that uniform. Really neat."

Her mouth twisted in that crooked, wry smile she had, and she said, "You fool. You stupid fool! You really think I'm simple, don't you? You really think a punk job like that seems like big stuff to me? Well, it doesn't! I think it stinks."

"But —" I didn't know what to say.

"Get smart, honey," she said. "This is it. It's our chance to really do it. To work our plan."

Then I was really confused. "What plan?" I said.

"To rob a bank, silly," she said. "Listen!"

Like a fool — like the stupid fool she called me — I did. I sat there and listened while she told me how we were going to do it. How we were going to Mexico and live like kings. Knowing she was no good and no good for me. Knowing it was all crazy — yet I sat there and listened. And the darndest part was, she made it sound plausible.

Two days later I fumbled a big deal. Intentionally. I lost my temper and told a purchasing agent where he could go. He called up the boss and read me off, and that was that. I was fired.

Oh, I made it sound good. I pleaded and protested that I'd been feeling sick, and promised that it would never happen again. But that was that. I was fired. And our plan had started.

On the top floor of the Plaza Trust there's a suite of offices. They're occupied by the Briney Armored Car Service. Up there they handle big sums of cold cash. Cold cash in small bills that aren't marked.

The next day I walked over to the Plaza Trust. I rode up on the elevator Soney was running, but I didn't speak to her or even look at her. She didn't look at me. There were other people on the car.

I asked the personnel manager at the Briney Armored Car Service for a job. There was one open — as a guard. Soney had promised that. She'd known it even before she took the elevator job. From dating one of the Briney employees.

The personnel man couldn't understand why I wanted that kind of job — when I'd been making twice as much. I gave him a long story about how I got fired. About being in the infantry and how I missed the excitement — handling guns. That stuff.

He swallowed it, I guess. Anyway, I filled out a couple miles of forms.

Three days later I got a call to report for work. I figured the references had done it. Plenty of influential people had known my father, and known me — a little. At least they recognized my name.

I was given a uniform and a gun. A side arm. And Soney's plan was beginning to work.

A reasonable amount of time had to pass. Two months, at least. They were hard. Soney wouldn't let anybody see us together.

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I couldn't go to her place any more, or even to *The Triple T*. People might remember. And I couldn't call her at her rooming house because the phone was in the hall and there was always the chance she'd be overheard.

So to perfect our plans for the big day, I'd drive out to the end of the bus line and park on a darkened street, and Soney would ride out to the end of the line and walk two blocks to the car. And we'd change the location of the meeting place every night or so, just in case.

Then one night she got in the car and I handed her the bottle I'd been drinking from — to give myself guts — and I said, "Tomorrow's it."

She didn't even take a drink, she was so excited.

"How much?" she said. "Tell me.

"More than we figured — nearly one hundred thousand. The L. Stacey Manufacturing Co. payroll. Enough to live like Aga Khan for the rest of our lives. In Mexico."

And then Soney laughed. That brittle, bitter laugh she had when she was paying someone off. "That's good," she said, "that's wonderful. I worked for that Stacey one time. For forty-five cents an hour. That's wonderful — I only wish there weren't such a thing as insurance."

"Come off it," I said. "You'll have the rest of your life to gloat if you do your job right. Right now, we have to plan. The timing has to be split-second. Or it won't work. And you'll be a number for the next ten years instead of a queen on a ranch."

So we talked for an hour, and it was set. When I went home I couldn't sleep and three goof pills didn't help.

The success of the whole plan hinged on one weakness in the Briney organization. A desire to save money on personnel.

Whenever money was transferred from truck to building, or vice versa, two men were always in sight of the money. Except — early in the morning when payrolls were taken from the vault to the truck.

That was where the Briney executives had slipped up. Figuring there was more danger from robbery on the street early in the morning, they had two men of the regular three-man crew go down to guard the truck and the building entrance. And one man was trusted to take the money down in the elevator alone.

They figured there was no place he could hide it and no way he could get out of the building with it. But he's timed very carefully. If he isn't down on the sidewalk in ninety seconds flat, the man in the truck covers the building entrance from the truck porthole, and the other guard sounds the alarm. And the police are there in thirty seconds, guarding all exits and ready to search the building.

I was the guard who carried the money. Over ninety thousand bucks in small bills. Not marked.

At exactly six thirty-five the vault keeper handed me the money in two canvas bags, and I signed for it. At six thirty-six the other two guards left for the elevator. At six thirty-

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eight the vault keeper looked up from his watch and told me to start down. And Soney and I had exactly ninety seconds to pull off our plan.

Picking up the two bags, I walked out through the door and down the hall to the elevators. Around the turn in the hall — praying there wouldn't be two elevators at the top, to save me from making the only move that could ruin my whole life. There were only three elevators and they were supposed to be synchronized, but this morning Soney had to have hers at the top whether it was on schedule or not.

But luck — and I didn't know then whether it was good or bad — was with us. Only one set of doors were open. Soney's. But a lighted car wasn't there. Just the dark shaft showing through the door.

It was working. I threw the bags *on top* of Soney's elevator. When she heard the thump she brought her elevator up from the floor below, slammed the doors shut, and scooted for the bottom.

I counted to twenty-five — then drew my gun and fired at the stairway. And started running and firing and yelling at the top of my voice to sound the alarm. It was done — and there was no getting out of it any more.

As I ran down the stairs, emptying my gun into the walls, I slugged myself on the chin as hard as I could with my left hand, and I slipped. Tumbled half a flight and knocked myself out.

When I came to, the building burglar alarm was still ringing and one of the guards who had preceded me down the elevator was throwing water on me and a couple of cops were looking at me with shrewd, distrustful eyes.

The cop who wore a lieutenant's bars said roughly, "Okay, that's enough. He's coming around." Then he helped me up on my feet, and said, "All right, bud. Let's hear it. What happened? Some guy slugged you and ducked down the stairs, I know. And he moved so fast, even carrying those heavy bags, that a bullet wouldn't catch up with him."

"That's right," I said — and: "Give me a cigarette." My head was bleeding slightly, and it throbbed, and I was scared. Plenty scared. Soney could have already crossed us up by acting nervous.

"Yeah?" the lieutenant said. "The crooks don't hold up you Briney guys. They know you're all too well trained and too gooda shots. You musta had a buddy. You give him the dough and let him get a good head start, and then you start blasting and yelling."

I didn't say anything.

"You might as well tell us right now," he said. "We'll have your buddy in a coupla minutes and he'll tell us. There ain't no way he can get out of the building. We'll get him if we have to go through every room and broom closet in the joint. And that's what we're doing right now."

"I'll wait," I said. "The guy slugged me and ran down the stairway. That's

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all. I'm not so simple I think I could get away with something like you say. Neither can the guy get away — I know that."

"Okay, buddy, okay," the cop said, "that's the way it was until we find out different. Now what did this robber look like?"

"It happened pretty fast," I said, "but he had on a gray topcoat, and a brown hat — I think. He was big — bigger than I am — and he was carrying a Luger. It looked like that to me — and I've seen a lot of Lugers."

"Check with the elevator operators," the lieutenant said to the sergeant who was with him. "See if they remember anybody like that come up in the elevator."

Then we went up to the office of the Briney Armored Car Service, and all the wheels were there. Half dressed — as if they'd just been called out of bed.

The personnel manager had an accusing look on his face. After all, I'd only been there a little over two months, and so was good cause for suspicion. J. B. Smith, the general manager, bustled up to me, all oily and solicitous about whether I'd been hurt.

I had to go over my story for every executive in the place and they wrote down the description and everything, like I said it happened.

And then the sergeant came back. He had Soney with him. I felt myself begin to sweat — but that was the way she had it planned. To back up my story on the description.

"His story checks, lieutenant," the sergeant bellowed. "This young lady claims she took a man answering that description up to the tenth floor this morning."

"What time?" the lieutenant asked Soney.

"Right after I come on at six," Soney answered. "I kinda wondered where he was goin' that early in the mornin', but it happens now and then. Someone can't sleep. I knew I'd never seen him before, but we get new tenants in here all the time. So I didn't think too much about it." She was plenty cool.

Then they took both our names and addresses, and made us wait until the entire building had been searched by what must have been the whole police force. And that was that.

They couldn't figure how the robber got out. Or — if I had pulled something off with a confederate — where the money could have been hidden.

But they didn't have a thing to go on, so finally they let Soney go back to work, and the personnel manager told me to take the rest of the day off and to go see the company doctor about my head.

As I walked over to the doctor's office, I did some heavy thinking. I knew the whole detective force would be checking on Soney and me, and I prayed no one would remember seeing me with her.

The part of the job that was over was the easy part. I realized now that it had been practically fool-proof.

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With a girl of Soney's nerve and determination helping — and planning.

The really dangerous part was ahead. And there were plenty of things that could happen to bust the whole deal wide open.

First and foremost, the money had to be taken off the top of Soney's elevator — but quick. Plenty of time the maintenance men carried things up or down by standing on top of the elevators. That's what had given Soney the idea in the first place. She'd seen it done in other buildings.

Or something could go wrong with one of the elevators, and someone would be in the shaft. If that money was spotted on her car, it wouldn't take too long for them to link us up together. They'd have something to go on. And bingo.

Getting that money out of the building was going to be tough. At first, I'd said it couldn't even be done. But Soney had an elaborate plan which sounded like it might work. But elaborate plans are hard to handle.

It was going to be hard because we'd both be followed and watched constantly. We definitely could not be seen talking together. So there wouldn't be any chance to talk things over again. Or change our plans, if anything went wrong.

I stayed in my apartment all day, and nothing I swallowed seemed to help. Six o'clock finally came, and I went out to dinner. The icy wind felt good.

There was a man waiting in a car down the street and he was still with me when I parked. After dinner I drove downtown and ducked into a parking space I'd had reserved for two weeks. And used every day for just this one time.

While the cop was looking for a place to park, I bought a ticket and walked into the theatre across from the lot. And went straight into the manager's office. Soney had set that up. She knew the manager and the exact time he went to dinner every night. The door to the men's room was right next door to the manager's office, and if the usher didn't take too careful a look, he'd be sure to tell the cop I'd gone there.

Watching through the crack of the door, I saw the detective come in and look around. He spoke to the usher and then he walked into the men's room and came out and stood looking around. Then he walked in and took a seat where he could see all the exits. Except the main entrance — but he could see anybody coming down the aisle.

Only I didn't have to come down the aisle. I ducked out of the manager's office and out of the entrance. I couldn't help running to the corner.

I walked five blocks to the corner of Ohio and East, and there it was. The blue Plymouth that Soney had rented the day before. The keys were in the glove compartment, and I took off.

It was exactly seven fifty-nine. In two minutes I had to drive up the alley behind the Plaza Trust. I did.

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Meanwhile Soney had been busy. According to our plans, she was to shake her shadow by six o'clock. She'd pulled the old powder-room gag.

During the day she'd had to get down to the basement and snafu the lock on the freight elevator. So she could get in through the alley.

When she got in the building, she had to walk up twelve flights, unlock her elevator, move it down to the eleventh floor, walk back up, remove the money from the top of the elevator, then go down and move the elevator back up.

This all had to be done without a cleaning woman seeing her, or the night watchman who ran the one elevator at night. Or anybody else who might be working late.

After she got the money, she had to carry it down the hall to an office that had windows overlooking the alley. She'd got the key by dating a man who worked in the office, swiping his keys, having one made the next day, and then giving them back — saying she'd found them in her apartment.

She was waiting by the open window in the dark office above the alley when I flashed the car lights three times. Almost immediately, I saw a dark shape coming slowly down the back side of the building. It was the two money bags on a rope.

I drove to the country, put the money in a wooden box in a hole we'd dug two weeks before in a lonely cornfield, and covered it up. I put the Plymouth back where I'd found it, walked to my car, and drove home.

Soney had to spend the night in that office because the night watchman came on at seven and he usually parked by the stairway to the basement, where she had to go to get out by the freight elevator. But the cops are rather used to a gal like Soney not coming home to sleep.

Then all we had to do was wait. Wait wait wait. And drink to keep from getting too fidgety, and hope you wouldn't get drunk and spill it all some night.

And for me it was dream about Soney and I wished I could see her. Soney and Mexico and a ranch forever.

The police never could understand how the robber got out of the building, and they had me over to headquarters several times. But they just didn't have a thing. Not a thing.

Briney Armored Service kept me on. Maybe to keep an eye on me. But they changed their system. Figured it was better to have four men do the work of three, they said.

I was really worried sick for about a month. And then I began to realize that we'd really pulled it off. Just like Soney said we would. And then I began to wonder how she was spending her nights and whether the money was still in the hole. Because Soney was not the kind of girl you feel too sure about.

One night I couldn't stand it any longer, and I drove out to the place I'd stashed the money. And it was gone. There was a hole, but no box, no dough.

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The earth around the hole was fresh — plenty fresh. And there were car tracks.

It could have been somebody else who found it. But probably not. I figured fast — and took a gamble.

Pouring the coal on my heap, I raced to the U-Drive-It garage. The same one the car had come from before, on that big night. Instead of heading for Soney's house.

I was right, and all kinds of luck were with me. By pushing it I'd beaten her there. I was standing behind the entrance out of sight when I saw her yellow head in a car that pulled in and stopped with a jerk of brakes.

Soney could think fast.

"Honey," she said, breathlessly and very low, when I rushed up to grab her, wanting to kill her. "Honey, I've been trying to call you —" She must have known by my face that I'd been out to the money and found it gone.

"Make it good," I said.

"Park, honey, I think they know. They've been questioning me for hours. Somebody told about seeing us together in *The Triple T*. It was the other waitress, I think."

I knew she was lying, but it scared me because I'd been wondering if something like that wouldn't happen. Maybe it would've, sooner or later. Anyway, I let her tell me that. And I guess she was afraid to change her story because of what she saw in my face. Maybe I'm to blame for the blunder.

"Get my bags," she said, giving me the key to the trunk. The biggest bag was plenty heavy and I knew what was in it. The future in Mexico. With a girl who was a fourflusher.

We left town in a hurry — out U. S. 40. Without my clothes. Without saying anything to the Briney Armored Car Service. Without Soney saying anything to the Plaza Trust.

It was stupid. And we hadn't planned it that way. In another month — a safe time — we could have both changed jobs. And then moved to other towns. Different ones. And then met later, on the way to the border.

But I guess Soney was just a chippy, who'd never had a chance to learn to play square. And so the whole carefully-planned deal was queered that night. That quick.

It was beginning to snow as we left town, and Soney shivered and said, "Park, I'm gonna get a fur coat in the first big city we hit tomorrow morning." And then she talked and talked about all the things she was going to buy with the money, until she finally went to sleep. And I barreled the car west. I stopped in Kansas City and she bought a dyed muskrat that looked like mink, after I talked her out of the real thing.

We hit Oklahoma that day about noon. I was getting worried. I figured four hours was long enough for Briney and the Plaza Trust and the police to get together and start to add.

The police back home had my license number and the description of my car, and pretty soon so would the

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police in Oklahoma. And Texas, if we got that far.

So just outside of Tulsa I turned off into a country road and drove the car over into a gully.

"Get out," I told Soney, "and get the bags out." I pushed the car until gravity took it and it crashed down — way down — where nobody would see it for a long time.

Maybe months — because it was beginning to snow pretty hard. And I'd heard on the radio that a blizzard was coming. So maybe it would even be covered up and not discovered until spring.

It was nearly two miles to the city bus line, and we were nearly frozen before we made it. In Tulsa I bought a good used car. Paid for in fairly small bills from the suitcase.

And I made Soney go to a beauty shop way off on a side street and get herself changed into a brunette.

And we were off. Into the blizzard. The radio was warning people to stay at home. But that didn't mean anything to Soney and me. We had to move.

I had been planning to head from Tulsa down to Dallas and Fort Worth and through San Antone into Laredo and across the border there. But then Soney said:

"Really, Park, I wasn't trying to run out last night. It was true. They were suspicious. You've got to believe me. Mexico, the ranch, won't mean anything if you don't."

And I believed her and got panicky. Thinking the police would be more apt to figure us for the direct route, I took off cross-country for the panhandle. Figuring to cut down towards El Paso through New Mexico. We could buy horses and cross the border in Arizona. I knew that country a little.

Night came, and then midnight, and then we were in the panhandle. And then we were in the northern tip of New Mexico. And there was a road-block ahead. The sweat broke out on my forehead and my hands.

"This may be it," I said to Soney, as we approached. "We should have had the radio on. There might have been news."

"Relax," she said. I looked at her face in the cold blizzard light, and it had that funny crooked smile. Her eyes were as cold as the snow that swirled through the darkness. And in her new black hair she looked like somebody I'd never seen — and never wanted to see.

"Relax," she said. "There's only one cop. There's two of us and I got this. I'll take care of you."

And she eased her hand out of the new fur coat. Long enough to let me see a gun.

But I couldn't say anything more because the patrolman was waving at us to stop. He had a shotgun crooked in his arm, but that doesn't always mean anything on a lonely stretch of road like that one.

I rolled the window down.

He seemed friendly. Young and pink-faced from the cold.

"Where you folks headed?" he

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asked cheerily. "Pretty bad up ahead. Can't get through, I'm afraid. Better turn back."

"Can't we get through at all, officer?" I asked, trying to keep my voice steady. "We're in a pretty big hurry. I'm due at a meeting in Santa Fe."

"Sorry," the pink-faced patrolman said. "It's plain suicide up ahead. Drifts ten feet high some places. You'll have to back up till you can turn around. And you'd better hurry."

I started to protest, when Soney said, "Look, copper, the man said we're in a hurry. Get out of the way."

The cop opened his mouth in surprise — and Soney fired. Right in his mouth. Through the pocket in her new fur coat. From the hip. And the cop's face had a hole in it, and he fell over backwards into the snow. And in thirty seconds the blizzard had covered the red stain on the snow.

I looked foolishly at the smoking, smouldering hole in Soney's new coat. She had the gun out of her pocket and pointed at me.

"Get movin'! Or do you wanta urp first."

I did and just got my head out the window in time. Then I drove off into the blizzard, still unable to speak. With Soney holding a gun on me.

Within ten minutes we ran into a drift and the car stalled and wouldn't move either way. Even though Soney did have a gun.

She put the gun away and said, "Now what do we do?"

"You name it," I said, "it was your idea." And I kept thinking of that young pink-faced cop with the hole in his face, and I had to get out of the car again.

The blizzard was getting worse. You couldn't see ten feet now in any direction, and there was nothing but snow and more snow. And darkness.

"Well, don't stand there. Do something," Soney said. She was out of the car standing beside me.

"What is there to do?" I asked. "And you'd better get rid of this gun, in case help does come. Just in case," I said.

"Don't be funny," she said, and then turned the gun on me. "Look for some wood. We'll build a fire."

That sounded sensible, and I looked around, but you couldn't see anything but snow and darkness. No trees, no fence posts, nothing.

We both walked away from the car a little way to look for something that might burn. But it was no use.

When we came back to the car, I grabbed her when she wasn't looking and wrenched the gun away from her and threw it as far away as I could. Out into the darkness into some deep drift.

But I really didn't think anybody would come and find it on her. It was too much to hope for.

Without a word we both got back into the car and settled down to wait. I tried to keep the engine running so we could have some heat. Pretty soon it stalled. I started it again. And then it stalled and wouldn't start at all.

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The fine powdery snow of the blizzard was beginning to sift into the car. Through cracks you couldn't see. It covered us, and before long we were numb.

And though I hated the look and the touch of her, we huddled together and tried to keep warm.

Then I had an idea. How to put off death for a while. Without a word to her I got out of the car, and digging down through the snow, I pried off a hub cap with my knife.

"Get in the back seat," I ordered Soney, "we'll start a fire on the floor."

"With what?" she sneered.

"With this," I said, starting on the upholstery with my knife.

We started a little fire in the hub cap and huddled over it. The smoke was terrible and in two minutes our eyes were burning and we were both coughing — but the heat was good.

Two hours of that. Opening the door occasionally to clear the smoke out.

Then all the upholstery was gone. And when I felt myself get numb and I knew the dreams were just dreams, I began to want only one thing. To let people know how it all came to happen. How it was because of Soney and not me. How I never would have done it without Soney.

I especially wanted my friends to know that it had been Soney who killed that pink-faced cop. Not me.

And there was only one way to do it. Write it. And to do that I had to have some more fire. Just fire enough until I finish.

Without a word I got out of the car into the howling wind and snow. I don't know how long it took me to struggle around to the trunk compartment and get out the heavy suitcase. Maybe half an hour.

When I got back in the car, Soney looked like she was asleep.

I'd burned maybe five thousand dollars worth of Soney's dreams of a ranch, and life as the movies say it is, when the heat brought her around. Or maybe it was the smoke. The coughing.

When she got her breath, she took one look at the bills burning in the hub cap and she let out a scream:

"Why, you stupid fool — what are you doing? Give that to me — give it to me! You can't burn my money!"

Soney lunged at me and buried her teeth in my neck and gouged at me with her long red fingernails. She knocked over the hub cap with its little fire, and the bills fell from my hand and showered around us like the snow outside.

Because Soney saw her dreams going up in smoke. The dreams she'd had since she was a little kid in Gary. All her have-nothing life of slinging hash and hitchhiking and drinking beer in places like *The Triple T*.

So I had to slug her. And then I put her on the back seat out of my way.

Soney died there from the cold as I fed her dreams into the fire in the hub cap. Crouched over it, trying to keep alive long enough to write this.

So you'd know it was because of Soney, and not me.

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No rule is so general, which admits not some exception.

— ROBERT BURTON

Agatha Christie's sensational book, THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD, *was first published in London in June 1926, and in New York the very next month. Miss Christie had already achieved success as a detective-story writer, but the appearance of* ROGER ACKROYD, *and the 'tec-tempest and crimino-controversy which followed, invested her name with a definite murder-magic; from the time* ROGER ACKROYD *became a cause célèbre, the Christie career has been nothing short of spectacular. Would you believe, therefore, in the light of Miss Christie's current reputation and popularity, that there is a short novel of hers, written in the* ROGER ACKROYD *period, which has never been published in book form in the United States? It is hard to believe, isn't it? — yet it is true, and perhaps the revelation will come as a greater surprise to Miss Christie's American publishers than to her American readers . . .*

Exactly three years and three months after the London appearance of ROGER ACKROYD *— that is to say, in September 1929 — The Readers Library Publishing Company Ltd., of Great Queen Street, Kingsway, London, issued a small volume, 4¼ x 6½, titled* TWO NEW CRIME STORIES. *The book contained a short novel by Agatha Christie called* THE UNDER DOG *and a short story by E. Phillips Oppenheim called "Blackman's Wood." About ten years later the same volume was reissued in the same size, but with a different kind of binding, by the Daily Express Fiction Library, London, under the new title* TWO THRILLERS. *So far as we have been able to check, those are the only two times Agatha Christie's* THE UNDER DOG *has ever been published in England; and so far as we can check and doublecheck, Agatha Christie's* THE UNDER DOG *has had no book publication whatever in the United States.*

Actually, THE UNDER DOG *was written by Miss Christie either just before or directly after she wrote* THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD *— we know that because the original copyright is dated 1926. So this "unknown" Christie novel was not only of the* ROGER ACKROYD *period, it was the running mate, so to speak, of Miss Christie's classic criminological bombshell. Is* THE UNDER DOG, *then, in the same class with* THE MURDER OF ROGER

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ACKROYD? *Regretfully, we must confess it is not, and Miss Christie herself, we are positive, would be the first one to admit it. But by what ratiocinative right can you expect two* ROGER ACKROYDs *from the same author in the same year?*

Sufficient unto the detectival day that we can offer you any *Christie short novel never before published in book form in America! And sufficient unto the detectival decade that an unpublished Christie short novel should also be — yes, we have been holding out on you! — an "unknown" exploit of Hercule Poirot!*

THE UNDER DOG *is too long to print in a single issue; but rather than deprive you of a "new" Hercule Poirot investigation, we have decided to break our editorial rule against serials, and give you* THE UNDER DOG *in two parts . . .*

You must remember that Hercule Poirot has a heart as big as his egg-shaped head, and always his heart is with the under dog. Tolerance, sympathy, understanding for the under dog — they are Hercule Poirot's deeper virtues, and the workings of his little gray cells, important as those labors are, take second place to Poirot's humanity. We will never forget the remark Poirot made to Hastings in "The Double Clue": "See you, my friend," said Poirot, "he has one law for the titled, and another law for the plain, this Mr. Hardman. Me, I have not yet been ennobled, so I am on the side of the plain."

Love that man!

THE UNDER DOG (*First of two parts*)

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

LILY MARGRAVE smoothed her gloves out on her knee with a nervous gesture, and darted a glance at the occupant of the big chair opposite her.

She had heard of M. Hercule Poirot, the well-known investigator, but this was the first time she had seen him in the flesh.

The comic, almost ridiculous, aspect that he presented disturbed her conception of him. Could this funny little man, with the egg-shaped head and the enormous mustaches, really do the wonderful things that were claimed for him? His occupation at the moment struck her as particularly childish. He was piling small blocks of

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colored wood one upon the other, and seemed far more interested in the result than in the story she was telling.

At her sudden silence, however, he looked sharply across at her.

"Mademoiselle, continue, I pray of you. It is not that I do not attend; I attend very carefully, I assure you."

He began once more to pile the little blocks of wood one upon the other, while the girl's voice took up the tale again. It was a gruesome tale, a tale of violence and tragedy, but the voice was so calm and unemotional, the recital was so concise that something of the savor of humanity seemed to have been left out of it.

She stopped at last.

"I hope," she said anxiously, "that I have made everything clear."

Poirot nodded his head several times in emphatic assent. Then he swept his hand across the wooden blocks, scattering them over the table, and, leaning back in his chair, his fingertips pressed together and his eyes on the ceiling, he began to recapitulate.

"Sir Reuben Astwell was murdered ten days ago. On Wednesday, the day before yesterday, his nephew, Charles Leverson, was arrested by the police. The facts against him as far as you know are — you will correct me if I am wrong, Mademoiselle.

"Sir Reuben was sitting up late writing in his own special sanctum, the Tower room. Mr. Leverson came in late, letting himself in with a latch key. He was overheard quarreling with his uncle by the butler, whose room was directly below the Tower room. The quarrel ended with a sudden thud as of a chair being thrown over and a half-smothered cry.

"The butler was alarmed, and thought of getting up to see what was the matter, but as a few seconds later he heard Mr. Leverson leave the room gaily whistling a tune, he thought nothing more of it. On the following morning, however, a housemaid discovered Sir Reuben dead by his desk. He had been struck down by some heavy instrument. The butler, I gather, did not at once tell the story to the police. That was natural, I think, eh, Mademoiselle?"

The sudden question made Lily Margrave start.

"I beg your pardon?" she said.

"One looks for humanity in these matters, does one not?" said the little man. "As you recited the story to me — so admirably, so concisely — you made of the actors in the drama machines — puppets. But me, I look always for human nature. I say to myself, this butler, this — what did you say his name was?"

"His name is Parsons."

"This Parsons, then, he will have the characteristics of his class, he will object very strongly to the police, he will tell them as little as possible. Above all, he will say nothing that might seem to incriminate a member of the household. A house-breaker, a burglar, he will cling to that idea with all the strength of extreme obstinacy. Yes, the loyalties of the servant class are an interesting study."

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He leaned back beaming.

"In the meantime," he went on, "everyone in the household has told his or her tale, Mr. Leverson among the rest, and his tale was that he had come in late and gone up to bed without seeing his uncle."

"That is what he said."

"And no one saw reason to doubt that tale," mused Poirot, "except, of course, Parsons. Then there comes down an inspector from Scotland Yard, Inspector Miller you said, did you not? I know him, I have come across him once or twice in the past. He is what they call the sharp man, the ferret, the weasel.

"Yes, I know him! And the sharp Inspector Miller, he sees what the local inspector has not seen, that Parsons is ill at ease and uncomfortable, and knows something that he has not told. *Eh bien*, he makes short work of Parsons. By now it has been clearly proved that no one broke into the house that night, that the murderer must be looked for inside the house and not outside. And Parsons is unhappy and frightened, and feels very relieved to have his secret knowledge drawn out of him.

"He has done his best to avoid scandal, but there are limits; and so Inspector Miller listens to Parsons' story, and asks a question or two, and then makes some private investigations of his own. The case he builds up is very strong — very strong.

"Blood-stained fingers rested on the corner of the chest in the Tower room, and the fingerprints were those of Charles Leverson. The housemaid told him she emptied a basin of blood-stained water in Mr. Leverson's room the morning after the crime. He explained to her that he had cut his finger, and he *had* a little cut there, oh yes, but such a very little cut! The cuff of his evening shirt had been washed, but they found blood stains in the sleeve of his coat. He was hard pressed for money, and he inherited money at Sir Reuben's death. Oh, yes, a very strong case, Mademoiselle." He paused.

"And yet you come to me today."

Lily Margrave shrugged her slender shoulders.

"As I told you, M. Poirot, Lady Astwell sent me."

"You would not have come of your own accord, eh?"

The little man glanced at her shrewdly. The girl did not answer.

"You do not reply to my question."

Lily Margrave began smoothing her gloves again.

"It is rather difficult for me, M. Poirot. I have my loyalty to Lady Astwell to consider. Strictly speaking, I am only her paid companion, but she has treated me more as though I were a daughter or a niece. She has been extraordinarily kind, and whatever her faults, I should not like to appear to criticise her actions, or — well, to prejudice you against taking up the case."

"Impossible to prejudice Hercule Poirot, *cela ne ce fait pas*," declared the little man cheerily. "I perceive that you think Lady Astwell has in

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her bonnet the buzzing bee. Come now, is it not so?"

"If I must say ——"

"Speak, Mademoiselle."

"I think the whole thing is simply silly."

"It strikes you like that, eh?"

"I don't want to say anything against Lady Astwell ——"

"I comprehend," murmured Poirot gently. "I comprehend perfectly." His eyes invited her to go on.

"She really is an awfully good sort, and frightfully kind, but she isn't — how can I put it? She isn't an educated woman. You know she was an actress when Sir Reuben married her, and she has all sorts of prejudices and superstitions. If she says a thing, it must be so, and she simply won't listen to reason. The Inspector was not very tactful with her, and it put her back up. She says it is nonsense to suspect Mr. Leverson and just the sort of stupid, pig-headed mistake the police would make, and that, of course, dear Charles did not do it."

"But she has no reasons, eh?"

"None whatever."

"Ha! Is that so? Really, now."

"I told her," said Lily, "that it would be no good coming to you with a mere statement like that and nothing to go on."

"You told her that," said Poirot, "did you really? That is interesting."

His eyes swept over Lily Margrave in a quick comprehensive survey, taking in the details of her neat black tailor-made, the touch of white at her throat, an expensive crêpe de Chine blouse showing dainty tucks, and the smart little black felt hat. He saw the elegance of her, the pretty face with its slightly pointed chin, and the dark blue long-lashed eyes. Insensibly his attitude changed; he was interested now, not so much in the case as in the girl sitting opposite him.

"Lady Astwell is, I should imagine, Mademoiselle, just a trifle inclined to be unbalanced and hysterical?"

Lily Margrave nodded eagerly.

"That describes her exactly. She is, as I told you, very kind, but it is impossible to argue with her or to make her see things logically."

"Possibly she suspects someone on her own account," suggested Poirot, "someone quite absurd."

"That is exactly what she does do," cried Lily. "She has taken a great dislike to Sir Reuben's secretary, poor man. She says she *knows* he did it, and yet it has been proved quite conclusively that poor Mr. Owen Trefusis cannot possibly have done it."

"And she has no reasons?"

"Of course not; it is all intuition with her."

Lily Margrave's voice was very scornful.

"I perceive, Mademoiselle," said Poirot, smiling, "that you do not believe in intuition?"

"I think it is nonsense," replied Lily.

Poirot leaned back in his chair.

"*Les femmes*," he murmured, "they like to think that it is a special weapon that the good God has given them, and for every once that it shows

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them the truth, at least nine times it leads them astray."

"I know," said Lily, "but I have told you what Lady Astwell is like. You simply cannot argue with her."

"So you, Mademoiselle, being wise and discreet, came along to me as you were bidden, and have managed to put me *au courant* of the situation."

Something in the tone of his voice made the girl look up sharply.

"Of course, I know," said Lily apologetically, "how very valuable your time is."

"You are too flattering, Mademoiselle," said Poirot, "but indeed — yes, it is true, at this present time I have many cases of moment on hand."

"I was afraid that might be so," said Lily, rising. "I will tell Lady Astwell —"

But Poirot did not rise also. Instead he lay back in his chair and looked steadily up at the girl.

"You are in haste to be gone, Mademoiselle? Sit down one more little moment, I pray of you."

He saw the color flood into her face and ebb out again. She sat down once more slowly and unwillingly.

"Mademoiselle is quick and decisive," said Poirot. "She must make allowances for an old man like myself, who comes to his decisions slowly. You mistook me, Mademoiselle. I did not say that I would not go down to Lady Astwell."

"You will come, then?"

The girl's tone was flat. She did not look at Poirot, but down at the ground, and so was unaware of the keen scrutiny with which he regarded her.

"Tell Lady Astwell, Mademoiselle, that I am entirely at her service. I will be at — Mon Repos, is it not? — this afternoon."

He rose. The girl followed suit.

"I — I will tell her. It is very good of you to come, M. Poirot. I am afraid, though, you will find you have been brought on a wild goose chase."

"Very likely, but — who knows?"

He saw her out with punctilious courtesy to the door. Then he returned to the sitting-room, frowning, deep in thought. Once or twice he nodded his head, then he opened the door and called to his valet.

"My good George, prepare me, I pray of you, a little valise. I go down to the country this afternoon."

"Very good, sir," said George.

He was an extremely English-looking person. Tall, cadaverous and unemotional.

"A young girl is a very interesting phenomenon, George," said Poirot, as he dropped once more into his armchair and lighted a tiny cigarette. "Especially, you understand, when she has brains. To ask someone to do a thing and at the same time to put them against doing it, that is a delicate operation. It requires finesse. She was very adroit — oh, very adroit — but Hercule Poirot, my good George, is of a cleverness quite exceptional."

"I have heard you say so, sir."

"It is not the secretary she has in mind," mused Poirot. "Lady Ast-

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well's accusation of him she treats with contempt. Just the same she is anxious that no one should disturb the sleeping dogs. I, my good George, I go to disturb them, I go to make the dog fight! There is a drama there, at Mon Repos. A human drama, and it excites me. She was adroit, the little one, but not adroit enough. I wonder — I wonder what I shall find there?"

Into the dramatic pause which succeeded these words George's voice broke apologetically:

"Shall I pack dress clothes, sir?"

Poirot looked at him sadly.

"Always the concentration, the attention to your own job. You are very good for me, George."

When the 4:55 drew up at Abbots Cross station, there descended from it M. Hercule Poirot, very neatly and foppishly attired, his mustaches waxed to a stiff point. He gave up his ticket, passed through the barrier, and was accosted by a tall chauffeur.

"Mr. Poirot?"

The little man beamed upon him.

"That is my name."

"This way, sir, if you please."

He held open the door of the big Rolls Royce limousine.

The house was a bare three minutes from the station. The chauffeur descended once more and opened the door of the car, and Poirot stepped out. The butler was already holding the front door open.

Poirot gave the outside of the house a swift appraising glance before passing through the open door. It was a big, solidly built red brick mansion, with no pretensions to beauty, but with an air of solid comfort.

Poirot stepped into the hall. The butler relieved him deftly of his hat and overcoat, then murmured with that deferential undertone only to be achieved by the best servants:

"Her Ladyship is expecting you, sir."

Poirot followed the butler up the soft carpeted stairs. This, without doubt, was Parsons, a very well-trained servant, with a manner suitably devoid of emotion. At the top of the staircase he turned to the right along a corridor. He passed through a door into a little anteroom, from which two more doors led. He threw open the left-hand one of these, and announced:

"M. Poirot, m'lady."

The room was not a very large one, and it was crowded with furniture and knickknacks. A woman, dressed in black, got up from a sofa and came quickly toward Poirot.

"M. Poirot," she said with outstretched hand. Her eyes ran rapidly over the dandified figure. She paused a minute, ignoring the little man's bow over her hand, and his murmured "My Lady," and then, releasing his hand after a sudden vigorous pressure, she exclaimed:

"I believe in small men! They are the clever ones."

"Inspector Miller," murmured Poirot, "is, I think, a tall man?"

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"He is a bumptious idiot," said Lady Astwell. "Sit down here by me, will you, M. Poirot?"

She indicated the sofa and went on:

"Lily did her best to put me off sending for you, but I have not come to my time of life without knowing my own mind."

"A rare accomplishment," said Poirot, as he followed her to the settee.

Lady Astwell settled herself comfortably among the cushions and turned so as to face him.

"Lily is a dear girl," said Lady Astwell, "but she thinks she knows everything, and as often as not in my experience those sort of people are wrong. I am not clever, M. Poirot, I never have been, but I am right where many a more stupid person is wrong. I believe in *guidance*. Now do you want me to tell you who is the murderer, or do you not? A woman knows, M. Poirot."

"Does Miss Margrave know?"

"What did she tell you?" asked Lady Astwell sharply.

"She gave me the facts of the case."

"The facts? Oh, of course they are dead against Charles, but I tell you, M. Poirot, he didn't do it. I *know* he didn't!"

She bent upon him an earnestness that was almost disconcerting.

"You are very positive, Lady Astwell?"

"Trefusis killed my husband, M. Poirot. I am sure of it."

"Why?"

"Why should he kill him, do you mean, or why am I sure? I tell you I *know* it! I am funny about those things. I made up my mind at once, and I stick to it."

"Did Mr. Trefusis benefit in any way by Sir Reuben's death?"

"Never left him a penny," returned Lady Astwell promptly. "Now that shows you dear Reuben couldn't have liked or trusted him."

"Had he been with Sir Reuben long, then?"

"Close on nine years."

"That is a long time," said Poirot softly, "a very long time to remain in the employment of one man. Yes, Mr. Trefusis, he must have known his employer well."

Lady Astwell stared at him.

"What are you driving at? I don't see what that has to do with it."

"I was following out a little idea of my own," said Poirot. "A little idea, not interesting, perhaps, but original, on the effects of service."

Lady Astwell still stared.

"You *are* very clever, aren't you?" she said in rather a doubtful tone. "Everybody says so."

Hercule Poirot laughed.

"Perhaps you shall pay me that compliment, too, Madame, one of these days. But let us return to the motive. Tell me now of your household, of the people who were here in the house on the day of the tragedy."

"There was Charles, of course."

"He was your husband's nephew, I understand, not yours."

"Yes, Charles was the only son of

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Reuben's sister. She married a comparatively rich man, but one of those crashes came — they do in the city — and he died, and his wife, too, and Charles came to live with us. He was twenty-three at the time, and going to be a barrister. But when the trouble came, Reuben took him into his office."

"He was industrious, M. Charles?"

"I like a man who is quick on the uptake," said Lady Astwell with a nod of approval. "No, that's just the trouble, Charles was *not* industrious. He was always having rows with his uncle over some muddle or other that he had made. Not that poor Reuben was an easy man to get on with. Many's the time I've told him that he had forgotten what it was to be young himself. He was very different in those days, M. Poirot."

Lady Astwell heaved a sigh of reminiscence.

"Changes must come, Milady," said Poirot. "It is the law."

"Still," said Lady Astwell, "he was never really rude to me. At least if he was, he was always sorry afterward — poor dear Reuben."

"He was difficult, eh?" said Poirot.

"*I* could always manage him," said Lady Astwell with the air of a successful lion tamer. "But it was rather awkward sometimes when he would lose his temper with the servants. There are ways of doing it, and Reuben's was not the right way."

"How exactly did Sir Reuben leave his money, Lady Astwell?"

"Half to me and half to Charles," replied Lady Astwell promptly. "The lawyers don't put it simply like that, but that's what it amounts to."

Poirot nodded his head.

"I see — I see," he murmured. "Now, Lady Astwell, I will demand of you that you will describe to me the household. There was yourself, and Sir Reuben's nephew, Mr. Charles Leverson, and the secretary, Mr. Owen Trefusis, and there was Miss Lily Margrave. Perhaps you will tell me something of that young lady."

"You want to know about Lily?"

"Yes, she has been with you long?"

"About a year. I have had a lot of secretary-companions, you know, but somehow or other they all got on my nerves. Lily was different. She was tactful and full of common sense, and besides she looks so nice. I do like to have a pretty face about me, M. Poirot. I am a funny kind of person; I take likes and dislikes straight away. As soon as I saw that girl, I said to myself: 'She'll do.' "

"Did she come to you through friends, Lady Astwell?"

"I think she answered an advertisement. Yes — that was it."

"You know something of her people, of where she comes from?"

"Her father and mother are out in India, I believe. I don't really know much about them, but you can see at a glance that Lily is a lady, can't you, M. Poirot?"

"Oh perfectly, perfectly."

"Of course," went on Lady Astwell, "I am not a lady myself. I know it, and the servants know it,

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but there is nothing mean-spirited about me. I can appreciate the real thing when I see it, and no one could be nicer than Lily has been to me. I look upon that girl almost as a daughter, M. Poirot, indeed I do."

Poirot's right hand strayed out and straightened one or two of the objects lying on a table near him.

"Did Sir Reuben share this feeling?" he asked.

His eyes were on the knickknacks, but doubtless he noted the pause before Lady Astwell's answer came.

"With a man it's different. Of course they — they got on very well."

"Thank you, Madame," said Poirot. He was smiling to himself.

"And these were the only people in the house that night?" he asked. "Excepting, of course, the servants."

"Oh, there was Victor."

"Victor?"

"Yes, my husband's brother, you know, and his partner."

"He lived with you?"

"No, he had just arrived on a visit. He has been out in West Africa for the past few years."

"West Africa," murmured Poirot.

He had learned that Lady Astwell could be trusted to develop a subject herself if sufficient time was given her.

"They say it's a wonderful country, but I think it's the kind of place that has a very bad effect upon a man. They drink too much, and they get uncontrolled. None of the Astwells has a good temper, and Victor's, since he came back from Africa, has been simply too shocking. He has frightened *me* once or twice."

"Did he frighten Miss Margrave, I wonder?" murmured Poirot gently.

"Lily? Oh, I don't think he has seen much of Lily."

Poirot made a note or two in a diminutive notebook; then he put the pencil back in its loop and returned the notebook to his pocket.

"I thank you, Lady Astwell. I will now, if I may, interview Parsons."

"Will you have him up here?"

Lady Astwell's hand moved toward the bell. Poirot arrested the gesture quickly.

"No, no, a thousand times no. I will descend to him."

"If you think it is better ——"

Lady Astwell was clearly disappointed at not being able to participate in the forthcoming scene. Poirot adopted an air of secrecy.

"It is essential," he said mysteriously, and left Lady Astwell duly impressed.

He found Parsons in the butler's pantry, polishing silver. Poirot opened the proceedings with one of his funny little bows.

"I must explain myself," he said. "I am a detective agent."

"Yes, sir," said Parsons, "we gathered as much."

His tone was respectful but aloof.

"Lady Astwell sent for me," continued Poirot. "She is not satisfied; no, she is not satisfied at all."

"I have heard her Ladyship say so on several occasions," said Parsons.

"In fact," said Poirot, "I recount to you the things you already know?

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Eh? Let us then not waste time on these bagatelles. Take me, if you will be so good, to your bedroom and tell me exactly what it was you heard there on the night of the murder."

The butler's room was on the ground floor, adjoining the servant's hall. It had barred windows, and the strong room was in one corner of it. Parsons indicated the narrow bed.

"I had retired, sir, at 11 o'clock. Miss Margrave had gone to bed, and Lady Astwell was with Sir Reuben in the Tower room."

"Lady Astwell was with Sir Reuben? Ah, proceed."

"The Tower room, sir, is directly over this. If people are talking in it one can hear the murmur of voices, but naturally not anything that is said. I must have fallen asleep about half-past eleven. It was just 12 o'clock when I was awakened by the sound of the front door being slammed to and knew Mr. Leverson had returned. Presently I heard footsteps overhead, and a minute or two later Mr. Leverson's voice talking to Sir Reuben.

"It was my fancy at the time, sir, that Mr. Leverson was — I should not exactly like to say drunk, but inclined to be a little indiscreet and noisy. He was shouting at his uncle at the top of his voice. I caught a word or two here or there, but not enough to understand what it was all about, and then there was a sharp cry and a heavy thud."

There was a pause, and Parsons repeated the last words.

"A heavy thud," he said impressively.

"If I mistake not, it is a *dull* thud in most works of romance," murmured Poirot.

"Maybe, sir," said Parsons severely. "It was a *heavy* thud I heard."

"A thousand pardons," said Poirot.

"Do not mention it, sir. After the thud, in the silence, I heard Mr. Leverson's voice as plain as plain can be, raised high. 'My God,' he said, 'My God,' just like that, sir."

Parsons, from his first reluctance to tell the tale, had now progressed to a thorough enjoyment of it. He fancied himself mightily as a narrator. Poirot played up to him.

"*Mon Dieu*," he murmured. "What emotion you must have experienced!"

"Yes, indeed, sir," said Parsons, "as you say, sir. Not that I thought very much of it at the time. But it *did* occur to me to wonder if anything was amiss, and whether I had better go up and see. I went to turn the electric light on, and was unfortunate enough to knock over a chair.

"I opened the door, and went through the servants' hall, and opened the other door which gives on a passage. The back stairs lead up from there, and as I stood at the bottom of them, hesitating, I heard Mr. Leverson's voice from up above, speaking hearty and cheery-like. 'No harm done, luckily,' he says. 'Good night,' and I heard him move off along the passage to his own room, whistling.

"Of course I went back to bed at

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once. Just something knocked over, that's all I thought it was. I ask you, sir, was I to think Sir Reuben was murdered, with Mr. Leverson saying good night and all?"

"You are sure it was Mr. Leverson's voice you heard?"

Parsons looked at the little Belgian pityingly, and Poirot saw clearly enough that, right or wrong, Parsons' mind was made up on this point.

"Is there anything further you would like to ask me, sir?"

"There is one thing," said Poirot, "do you like Mr. Leverson?"

"I — I beg your pardon, sir?"

"It is a simple question. Do you like Mr. Leverson?"

Parsons, from being startled at first, now seemed embarrassed.

"The general opinion in the servants' hall, sir," he said, and paused.

"By all means," said Poirot, "put it that way if it pleases you."

"The opinion is, sir, that Mr. Leverson is an open-handed young gentleman, but not, if I may say so, particularly intelligent, sir."

"Ah!" said Poirot. "Do you know, Parsons, that without having seen him, that is also precisely my opinion of Mr. Leverson."

"Indeed, sir."

"What is your opinion — I beg your pardon — the opinion of the servants' hall of the secretary?"

"He is a very quiet, patient gentleman, sir. Anxious to give no trouble."

"*Vraiment*," said Poirot.

The butler coughed.

"Her Ladyship, sir," he murmured, "is apt to be a little hasty in her judgments."

"Then, in the opinion of the servants' hall, Mr. Leverson committed the crime?"

"We none of us wish to think it was Mr. Leverson," said Parsons. "We — well, plainly we didn't think he had it in him, sir."

"But he has a somewhat violent temper, has he not?" asked Poirot.

Parsons came nearer to him.

"If you are asking me who had the most violent temper in the house —"

Poirot held up a hand.

"Ah! But that is not the question I should ask," he said softly. "My question would be, who has the best temper?"

Parsons stared at him open-mouthed.

Poirot wasted no further time on him. With an amiable little bow — he was always amiable — he left the room and wandered out into the big square hall of Mon Repos. There he stood a minute or two in thought, then, at a slight sound that came to him, cocked his head on one side in the manner of a perky robin, and finally, with noiseless steps, crossed to one of the doors that led out of the hall.

He stood in the doorway, looking into the room; a small room furnished as a library. At a big desk at the further end of it sat a thin, pale young man busily writing. He had a receding chin, and wore pince-nez.

Poirot watched him for some min-

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utes, and then he broke the silence by giving a completely artificial and theatrical cough.

"Ahem!" coughed M. Hercule Poirot.

The young man at the desk stopped writing and turned his head. He did not appear unduly startled, but an expression of perplexity gathered on his face as he eyed Poirot.

The latter came forward with a little bow.

"I have the honor of speaking to M. Trefusis, yes? Ah! my name is Poirot, Hercule Poirot. You may perhaps have heard of me."

"Oh — er — yes, certainly," said the young man.

Poirot eyed him attentively.

Owen Trefusis was about thirty-three years of age, and the detective saw at once why nobody was inclined to treat Lady Astwell's accusation seriously. Mr. Owen Trefusis was a prim, proper young man, disarmingly meek, the type of man who can be, and is, systematically bullied. One could feel quite sure that he would never display resentment.

"Lady Astwell sent for you, of course," said the secretary. "She mentioned that she was going to do so. Is there any way in which I can help you?"

His manner was polite without being effusive. Poirot accepted a chair, and murmured gently:

"Has Lady Astwell said anything to you of her beliefs and suspicions?"

Owen Trefusis smiled a little.

"As far as that goes," he said, "I believe she suspects me. It is absurd, but there it is. She has hardly spoken a civil word to me since, and she shrinks against the wall as I pass by."

His manner was perfectly natural, and there was more amusement than resentment in his voice. Poirot nodded with an air of engaging frankness.

"Between ourselves," he explained, "she said the same thing to me. I did not argue with her — me, I have made it a rule never to argue with very positive ladies. You comprehend, it is a waste of time."

"Oh, quite."

"I say, yes, Milady — oh, perfectly, Milady — *precisement*, Milady. They mean nothing, those words, but they soothe all the same. I make my investigations, for though it seems almost impossible that anyone except M. Leverson could have committed the crime, yet — well, the impossible has happened before now."

"I understand your position perfectly," said the secretary. "Please regard me as entirely at your service."

"*Bon*," said Poirot. "We understand one another. Now recount to me the events of that evening. Better start with dinner."

"Leverson was not at dinner, as you doubtless know," said the secretary. "He had a serious disagreement with his uncle, and went off to dine at the Golf Club. Sir Reuben was in a very bad temper in consequence."

"Not too amiable, *ce Monsieur*, eh?" hinted Poirot delicately.

Trefusis laughed.

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"Oh! He was a Tartar! I haven't worked with him for nine years without knowing most of his little ways. He was an extraordinarily difficult man, M. Poirot. He would get into childish fits of rage and abuse anybody who came near him. I was used to it by that time. I got into the habit of paying absolutely no attention to anything he said. He was not bad-hearted really, but he could be most foolish and exasperating in his manner. The great thing was never to answer him back."

"Were other people as wise as you were in that respect?"

Trefusis shrugged his shoulders.

"Lady Astwell enjoyed a good row," he said. "She was not in the least afraid of Sir Reuben, and she always stood up to him and gave him as good as she got. They always made up afterward, and Sir Reuben was really devoted to her."

"Did they quarrel that last night?"

The secretary looked at him sideways, hesitated a minute, then he said:

"I believe so; what made you ask?"

"An idea, that is all."

"I don't know, of course," explained the secretary, "but things looked as though they were working up that way."

Poirot did not pursue the topic.

"Who else was at dinner?"

"Miss Margrave, Mr. Victor Astwell, and myself."

"And afterward?"

"We went into the drawing-room. Sir Reuben did not accompany us. About ten minutes later he came in and hauled me over the coals for some trifling matter about a letter. I went up with him to the Tower room and set the thing straight; then Mr. Victor Astwell came in and said he had something he wished to talk to his brother about, so I went downstairs and joined the two ladies.

"About a quarter of an hour later I heard Sir Reuben's bell ringing violently, and Parsons came to say I was to go up to Sir Reuben at once. As I entered the room, Mr. Victor Astwell was coming out. He nearly knocked me over. Something had evidently happened to upset him. He has a very violent temper. I really believe he didn't see me."

"Did Sir Reuben make any comment on the matter?"

"He said: 'Victor is a lunatic; he will do for somebody some day when he is in one of these rages.'"

"Ah!" said Poirot. "Have you any idea what the trouble was about?"

"I couldn't say at all."

Poirot turned his head very slowly and looked at the secretary. Those last words had been uttered too hastily. He formed the conviction that Trefusis could have said more had he wished to do so. But once again Poirot did not press the question.

"And then? Proceed, I pray of you."

"I worked with Sir Reuben for about an hour and a half. At 11 o'clock Lady Astwell came in, and Sir Reuben told me I could go to bed."

"And you went?"

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"Yes."

"Have you any idea how long she stayed with him?"

"None at all. Her room is on the first floor, and mine is on the second, so I would not hear her go to bed."

"I see."

Poirot nodded his head once or twice and sprang to his feet.

"And now, Monsieur, take me to the Tower room."

He followed the secretary up the broad stairs to the first landing. Here Trefusis led him along the corridor, and through a baize door at the end of it, which gave on the servants' staircase and on a short passage that ended in a door. They passed through this door and found themselves on the scene of the crime.

It was a lofty room twice as high as any of the others, and was roughly about thirty feet square. Swords and assegais adorned the walls, and many native curios were arranged about on tables. At the far end, in the embrasure of the window, was a large writing table. Poirot crossed straight to it.

"It was here Sir Reuben was found?"

Trefusis nodded.

"He was struck from behind, I understand?"

Again the secretary nodded.

"The crime was committed with one of these native clubs," he explained. "A tremendously heavy thing. Death must have been practically instantaneous."

"That strengthens the conviction that the crime was not premeditated. A sharp quarrel, and a weapon snatched up almost unconsciously."

"Yes, it does not look well for poor Leverson."

"And the body was found fallen forward on the desk?"

"No, it had slipped sideways to the ground."

"Ah," said Poirot, "that is curious."

"Why curious?" asked the secretary.

"Because of this."

Poirot pointed to a round irregular stain on the polished surface of the writing table.

"That is a blood stain, *mon ami*."

"It may have splattered there," suggested Trefusis, "or it may have been made later, when they moved the body."

"Very possibly, very possibly," said the little man. "There is only the one door to this room?"

"There is a staircase here."

Trefusis pulled aside a velvet curtain in the corner of the room nearest the door, where a small spiral staircase led upward.

"This place was originally built by an astronomer. The stairs lead up to the tower where the telescope was fixed. Sir Reuben had the place fitted up as a bedroom, and sometimes slept there if he was working very late."

Poirot went nimbly up the steps. The circular room upstairs was plainly furnished, with a camp bed, a chair and dressing-table. Poirot satisfied himself that there was no other exit, and then came down again to where Trefusis stood waiting for him.

"Did you hear Mr. Leverson come in?" he asked.

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Trefusis shook his head.

"I was fast asleep by that time."

Poirot nodded. He looked slowly round the room.

"*Eh bien!*" he said at last. "I do not think there is anything further here, unless — perhaps you would be so kind as to draw the curtains."

Obediently Trefusis pulled the heavy black curtains across the window at the far end of the room. Poirot switched on the light — which was masked by a big alabaster bowl hanging from the ceiling.

"There was a desk light?" he asked.

For reply the secretary clicked on a powerful green-shaded hand lamp, which stood on the writing table. Poirot switched the other light off, then on, then off again.

"*C'est bien!* I have finished here."

"Dinner is at half-past seven," murmured the secretary.

"I thank you, M. Trefusis, for your many amiabilities."

"Not at all."

Poirot went thoughtfully along the corridor to the room appointed for him. The immovable George was there laying out his master's things.

"My good George," he said presently, "I shall, I hope, meet at dinner a certain gentleman who begins to intrigue me greatly. A man who has come home from the tropics, George. With a tropical temper — so it is said. A man whom Parsons tries to tell me about, and whom Lily Margrave does not mention. The late Sir Reuben had a temper of his own, George. Supposing such a man to come into contact with a man whose temper was worse than his own — how do you say it? The fur would jump about, eh?"

"'Would fly' is the correct expression, sir, and it is not always the case, sir, not by a long way."

"No?"

"No, sir. There was my Aunt Jemima, sir, a most shrewish tongue she had, bullied a poor sister of hers who lived with her, something shocking she did. Nearly worried the life out of her. But if anyone came along who stood up to her, well, it was a very different thing. It was meekness she couldn't bear."

"Ha!" said Poirot, "it is suggestive — that."

George coughed apologetically.

"Is there anything I can do in any way," he inquired delicately, "to — er — assist you, sir?"

"Certainly," said Poirot promptly. "You can find out for me what color evening dress Miss Lily Margrave wore that night, and which housemaid attends her."

George received these commands with his usual stolidity.

"Very good, sir, I will have the information for you in the morning."

Poirot rose from his seat and stood gazing into the fire.

"You are very useful to me, George," he murmured. "Do you know, I shall not forget your Aunt Jemima?"

Poirot did not, after all, see Victor Astwell that night. A telephone mes-

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sage came from him that he was detained in London.

"He attends to the affairs of your late husband's business, eh?" asked Poirot of Lady Astwell.

"Victor is a partner," she explained. "He went out to Africa to look into some mining concessions for the firm. It *was* mining, wasn't it, Lily?"

"Yes, Lady Astwell."

"Gold mines, I think, or was it copper or tin? You ought to know, Lily, you were always asking Reuben questions about it all. Oh, do be careful, dear, you will have that vase over!"

"It is dreadfully hot in here with the fire," said the girl. "Shall I — shall I open the window a little?"

"If you like, dear," said Lady Astwell placidly.

Poirot watched while the girl went across to the window and opened it. She stood there a minute or two breathing in the cool night air. When she returned and sat down in her seat, Poirot said to her politely:

"So Mademoiselle is interested in mines?"

"Oh, not really," said the girl indifferently. "I listened to Sir Reuben, but I don't know anything about the subject."

"You pretended very well, then," said Lady Astwell. "Poor Reuben actually thought you had some ulterior motive in asking all those questions."

The little detective's eyes had not moved from the fire, into which he was steadily staring, but nevertheless, he did not miss the quick flush of vexation on Lily Margrave's face. Tactfully he changed the conversation. When the hour for good nights came, Poirot said to his hostess:

"May I have just two little words with you, Madame?"

Lily Margrave vanished discreetly. Lady Astwell looked inquiringly at the detective.

"You were the last person to see Sir Reuben alive that night?"

She nodded. Tears sprang into her eyes, and she hastily held a black-edged handkerchief to them.

"Ah, do not distress yourself, I beg of you do not distress yourself."

"It's all very well, M. Poirot, but I can't help it."

"I am a triple imbecile thus to vex you."

"No, no, go on. What were you going to say?"

"It was about 11 o'clock, I fancy, when you went into the Tower room, and Sir Reuben dismissed Mr. Trefusis. Is that right?"

"It must have been about then."

"How long were you with him?"

"It was just a quarter to twelve when I got up to my room; I remember glancing at the clock."

"Lady Astwell, will you tell me what your conversation with your husband was about?"

Lady Astwell sank down on the sofa and broke down completely. Her sobs were vigorous.

"We — qua — qua — quarreled," she moaned.

"What about?" Poirot's voice was coaxing, almost tender.

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"L — l — lots of things. It b — b — began with L — Lily. Reuben took a dislike to her — for no reason, and said he had caught her interfering with his papers. He wanted to send her away, and I said she was a dear girl, and I would not have it. And then he s — s — started shouting me down, and I wouldn't have that, so I just told him what I thought of him.

"Not that I really meant it, M. Poirot, and he said he had taken me out of the gutter to marry me, and I said — ah, but what does it all matter now? I shall never forgive myself. You know how it is, M. Poirot, I always did say a good row clears the air, and how was I to know someone was going to murder him that very night? Poor old Reuben."

Poirot had listened sympathetically to all this outburst.

"I have caused you suffering," he said. "I apologize. Let us now be very business-like — very practical, very exact. You still cling to your idea that Mr. Trefusis murdered your husband?"

Lady Astwell drew herself up.

"A woman's instinct, M. Poirot," she said solemnly, "never lies."

"Exactly, exactly," said Poirot. "But when did he do it?"

"When? After I left him, of course."

"You left Sir Reuben at a quarter to twelve. At five minutes to twelve Mr. Leverson came in. In that ten minutes you say the secretary came down from his bedroom and murdered him?"

"It is perfectly possible."

"So many things are possible," said Poirot. "It could be done in ten minutes. Oh, yes! But was it?"

"Of course he *says* he was in bed and fast asleep," said Lady Astwell, "but who is to know if he was or not?"

"Nobody saw him about," Poirot reminded her.

"Everybody was in bed and fast asleep," said Lady Astwell triumphantly. "Of course nobody saw him."

"I wonder," said Poirot to himself.

A short pause.

"*Eh bien*, Lady Astwell, I will wish you good night."

George deposited a tray of early morning coffee by his master's bedside.

"Miss Margrave, sir, wore a dress of light green chiffon on the night in question."

"Thank you, George, you are most reliable."

"The third housemaid looks after Miss Margrave, sir. Her name is Gladys."

"Thank you, George. You are invaluable."

"Not at all, sir."

"It is a fine morning," said Poirot, looking out of the window, "and no one is likely to be astir very early. I think, my good George, that we shall have the Tower room to ourselves if we proceed there to make a little experiment."

"You need me, sir?"

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"The experiment," said Poirot, "will not be painful."

The curtains were still drawn in the Tower room when they arrived there. George was about to pull them, when Poirot restrained him.

"We will leave the room as it is. Just turn on the desk lamp."

The valet obeyed.

"Now, my good George, sit down in that chair. Dispose yourself as though you were writing. *Très bien.* Me, I seize a club, I steal up behind you, so, and I hit you on the back of the head."

"Yes, sir," said George.

"Ah!" said Poirot, "but when I hit you, do not continue to write. You comprehend I cannot be exact. I cannot hit you with the same force with which the assassin hit Sir Reuben. When it comes to that point, we must do the make-believe. I hit you on the head, and you collapse, so. The arms well relaxed, the body limp. Permit me to arrange you. But no, do not flex your muscles."

He heaved a sigh of exasperation.

"You press admirably the trousers, George," he said, "but the imagination you possess it not. Get up and let me take your place."

Poirot in his turn sat down at the writing table.

"I write," he declared, "I write busily. You steal up behind me, you hit me on the head with the club. Crash! The pen slips from my fingers, I drop forward, but not very far forward, for the chair is low, and the desk is high, and, moreover, my arms support me. Have the goodness, George, to go back to the door, stand there, and tell me what you see."

"Ahem!"

"Yes, George?" encouragingly.

"I see you, sir, sitting at the desk."

"*Sitting* at the desk?"

"It is a little difficult to see plainly, sir," explained George, "being such a long way away, sir, and the lamp being so heavily shaded. If I might turn on this light, sir?"

His hand reached out to the switch.

"Not at all," said Poirot sharply. "We shall do very well as we are. Here am I bending over the desk, there are you standing by the door. Advance now, George, advance, and put your hand on my shoulder."

George obeyed.

"Lean on me a little, George, to steady yourself on your feet, as it were. Ah! *Voilà.*"

Hercule Poirot's limp body slid artistically sideways.

"I collapse — so!" he observed. "Yes, it is very well imagined. There is now something most important that must be done."

"Indeed, sir?" said the valet.

"Yes, it is necessary that I should breakfast well."

The little man laughed heartily at his own joke.

"The stomach, George; it must not be ignored."

George maintained a disapproving silence. Poirot went downstairs chuckling happily to himself. He was pleased at the way things were

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shaping. After breakfast he made the acquaintance of Gladys, the third housemaid. He was very interested in what she could tell him of the crime. She was sympathetic toward Charles, although she had no doubt of his guilt.

"Poor young gentleman, sir, it seems hard, it does, him not being quite himself at the time."

"He and Miss Margrave should have got on well together," suggested Poirot, "as the only two young people in the house."

Gladys shook her head.

"Very stand-offish Miss Lily was with him. She wouldn't have no carryings-on, and she made it plain."

"He was fond of her, was he?"

"Oh, only in passing, so to speak; no harm in it, sir. Mr. Victor Astwell, now he *is* properly gone on Miss Lily."

She giggled.

"*Ah vraiment!*"

Gladys giggled again.

"Sweet on her straight away he was. Miss Lily *is* just like a lily, isn't she, sir? So tall and such a lovely shade of gold hair."

"She should wear a green evening frock," mused Poirot. "There is a certain shade of green ——"

"She has one, sir," said Gladys. "Of course, she can't wear it now, being in mourning, but she had it on the very night Sir Reuben died."

"It should be a light green, not a dark green," said Poirot.

"It is a light green, sir. If you wait a minute I'll show it to you. Miss Lily has just gone out with the dogs."

Poirot nodded. He knew that as well as Gladys did. In fact, it was only after seeing Lily safely off the premises that he had gone in search of the housemaid. Gladys hurried away, and returned a few minutes later with a green evening dress on a hanger.

"*Exquis!*" murmured Poirot, holding up hands of admiration. "Permit me to take it to the light a minute."

He took the dress from Gladys, turned his back on her and hurried to the window. He bent over it, then held it out at arm's length.

"It is perfect," he declared. "Perfectly ravishing. A thousand thanks for showing it to me."

"Not at all, sir," said Gladys. "We all know that Frenchmen are interested in ladies' dresses."

"You are too kind," murmured Poirot.

He watched her hurry away again with the dress. Then he looked down at his two hands and smiled. In the right hand was a tiny pair of nail scissors, in the left was a neatly clipped fragment of green chiffon.

"And now," he murmured, "to be heroic."

He returned to his own apartment and summoned George.

"On the dressing-table, my good George, you will perceive a gold scarf pin."

"Yes, sir."

"On the washstand is a solution

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of carbolic. Immerse, I pray you, the point of the pin in the carbolic."

George did as he was bid. He had long ago ceased to wonder at the vagaries of his master.

"I have done that, sir."

"*Très bien!* Now approach. I tender to you my first finger; insert the point of the pin in it."

"Excuse me, sir, you want me to prick you, sir?"

"But, yes, you have guessed correctly. You must draw blood, you understand, but not too much."

George took hold of his master's finger. Poirot shut his eyes and leaned back. The valet stabbed at the finger with the scarf pin, and Poirot uttered a shrill yell.

"*Je vous remercie*, George," he said. "What you have done is ample."

Taking a small piece of green chiffon from his pocket, he dabbed his finger with it gingerly.

"The operation has succeeded to a miracle," he remarked, gazing at the result. "You have no curiosity, George? Now, that is admirable!"

The valet had just taken a discreet look out of the window.

"Excuse me, sir," he murmured, "a gentleman has driven up in a large car."

"Ah! Ah!" said Poirot. He rose briskly to his feet. "The elusive Mr. Victor Astwell. I go down to make his acquaintance."

Poirot was destined to hear Mr. Victor Astwell some time before he saw him. A loud voice rang out from the hall.

"Mind what you are doing, you damned idiot! That case has got glass in it. Curse you, Parsons, get out of the way! Put it down, you fool!"

Poirot skipped nimbly down the stairs. Victor Astwell was a big man. Poirot bowed to him politely.

"Who the devil are you?" roared the big man.

Poirot bowed again.

"My name is Hercule Poirot."

"Lord!" said Victor Astwell. "So Nancy sent for you, after all, did she?"

He put a hand on Poirot's shoulder and steered him into the library.

"So you are the fellow they make such a fuss about," he remarked, looking him up and down. "Sorry for my language just now. That chauffeur of mine is a damned ass, and Parsons always does get on my nerves, blithering old idiot.

"I don't suffer fools gladly, you know," he said, half apologetically, "but by all accounts you are not a fool, eh, M. Poirot?"

He laughed breezily.

"Those who have thought so have been sadly mistaken," said Poirot placidly.

"Is that so? Well, so Nancy has carted you down here — got a bee in her bonnet about the secretary. There is nothing in that; Trefusis is as mild as milk — drinks milk, too, I believe. The fellow is a teetotaler. Rather waste of your time, isn't it?"

"If one has an opportunity to observe human nature, time is never wasted," said Poirot quietly.

"Human nature, eh?"

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Victor Astwell stared at him, then he flung himself down in a chair.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, you can tell me what your quarrel with your brother was about that evening."

Victor Astwell shook his head.

"Nothing to do with the case," he said decisively.

"One can never be sure," said Poirot.

"It had nothing to do with Charles Leverson."

"Lady Astwell thinks that Charles had nothing to do with the murder."

"Oh, Nancy!"

"Parsons assumes that it was M. Charles Leverson who came in that night, but he didn't see him. Remember nobody saw him."

"You are wrong there," said Astwell. "I saw him."

"You saw him?"

"It's very simple. Reuben had been pitching into young Charles — not without good reason, I must say. Later on he tried to bully me. I told him a few home truths and, just to annoy him, I made up my mind to back the boy. I meant to see him that night, so as to tell him how the land lay. When I went up to my room I didn't go to bed. Instead, I left the door ajar and sat on a chair smoking. My room is on the second floor, M. Poirot, and Charles's room is next to it."

"Pardon my interrupting you — Mr. Trefusis, he, too, sleeps on that floor?"

Astwell nodded.

"Yes, his room is just beyond mine."

"Nearer the stairs?"

"No, the other way."

A curious light came into Poirot's face, but the other didn't notice it and went on:

"As I say, I waited up for Charles. I heard the front door slam, as I thought, about five minutes to twelve, but there was no sign of Charles for about ten minutes. When he did come up the stairs I saw that it was no good tackling him that night."

He lifted his elbows significantly.

"I see," murmured Poirot.

"Poor devil couldn't walk straight," said Astwell. "He was looking pretty ghastly, too. I put it down to his condition at the time. Of course, now I realize that he had come straight from committing the crime."

Poirot interposed a quick question.

"You heard nothing from the Tower room?"

"No, but you must remember that I was right at the other end of the building. The walls are thick, and I don't believe you would even hear a pistol shot fired from there."

Poirot nodded.

"I asked if he would like some help getting to bed," continued Astwell. "But he said he was all right and went into his room and banged the door. I undressed and went to bed."

Poirot was staring thoughtfully at the carpet.

"You realize, M. Astwell," he said at last, "that your evidence is very important?"

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"I suppose so, at least — what do you mean?"

"Your evidence that ten minutes elapsed between the slamming of the front door and Leverson's appearance upstairs. He himself says, so I understand, that he came into the house and went straight up to bed. But there is more than that. Lady Astwell's accusation of the secretary is fantastic, I admit, yet up to now it has not been proved impossible. But your evidence creates an alibi."

"How is that?"

"Lady Astwell says that she left her husband at a quarter to twelve, while the secretary had gone to bed at eleven o'clock. The only time he could have committed the crime was between a quarter to twelve and Charles Leverson's return. Now, if, as you say, you sat with your door open, he could not have come down from his room without your seeing him."

"That is so," agreed the other.

"There is no other staircase?"

"No, to get down to the Tower room he would have had to pass my door, and he didn't, I am quite sure of that. And, anyway, M. Poirot, as I said just now, the man is as meek as a parson, I assure you."

"But yes, but yes," said Poirot soothingly, "I understand all that." He paused. "And you will not tell me the subject of your quarrel with Sir Reuben?"

The other's face turned a dark red.

"You'll get nothing out of me."

Poirot looked at the ceiling.

"I can always be discreet," he murmured, "where a lady is concerned."

Victor Astwell sprang to his feet.

"Damn you, how did you — what do you mean?"

"I was thinking," said Poirot, "of Miss Lily Margrave."

Victor Astwell stood undecided for a minute or two, then his color subsided, and he sat down again.

"You are too clever for me, M. Poirot. Yes, it was Lily we quarreled about. Reuben had his knife into her; he had ferreted out something or other about the girl — false references, something of that kind. I don't believe a word of it myself.

"And then he went further than he had any right to go, talked about her stealing down at night and getting out of the house to meet some fellow or other. My God! I gave it to him; I told him that better men than he had been killed for saying less. That shut him up. Reuben was inclined to be a bit afraid of me when I got going."

"I hardly wonder at it," murmured Poirot politely.

"I think a lot of Lily Margrave," said Victor in another tone. "A nice girl through and through."

Poirot did not answer. He was staring in front of him, seemingly lost in abstraction. He came out of his brown study with a jerk.

"I must, I think, promenade myself a little. There is a hotel here, yes?"

"Two," said Victor Astwell, "the Golf Hotel up by the links and the Mitre down by the station."

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"I thank you," said Poirot. "Yes, certainly I must promenade myself a little."

The Golf Hotel, as befits its name, stands on the golf links almost adjoining the club house. It was to this hostelry that Poirot repaired first in the course of that "promenade" which he had advertised himself as being about to take. The little man had his own way of doing things. Three minutes after he had entered the Golf Hotel he was in private consultation with Miss Langdon, the manageress.

"I regret to incommode you in any way, Mademoiselle," said Poirot, "but you see I am a detective."

Simplicity always appealed to him. In this case the method proved efficacious at once.

"A detective!" exclaimed Miss Langdon, looking at him doubtfully.

"Not from Scotland Yard," Poirot assured her. "In fact — you may have noticed it? I am not an Englishman. No, I make the private inquiries into the death of Sir Reuben Astwell."

"You don't say, now!" Miss Langdon goggled at him expectantly.

"Precisely," said Poirot, beaming. "Only to someone of discretion like yourself, would I reveal the fact. I think, Mademoiselle, you may be able to aid me. Can you tell me of any gentleman staying here on the night of the murder who was absent from the hotel that evening and returned to it about twelve or half-past?"

Miss Langdon's eyes opened wider than ever.

"You don't think ——?" she breathed.

"That you had the murderer here? No, but I have reason to believe that a guest staying here promenaded himself in the direction of Mon Repos that night, and if so he may have seen something which, though conveying no meaning to him, might be very useful to me."

The manageress nodded her head sapiently, with an air of one thoroughly well up in the annals of detective law.

"I understand perfectly. Now, let me see; who did we have staying here?"

She frowned, evidently running over the names in her mind, and helping her memory by occasionally checking them off on her fingertips.

"Captain Swann, Mr. Elkins, Major Blunt, old Mr. Benson. No, really, sir, I don't believe anyone went out that evening."

"You would have noticed if they had done so, eh?"

"Oh, yes, sir, it is not very usual, you see. I mean gentlemen go out to dinner and all that, but they don't go out after dinner, because — well, there is nowhere to go to, is there?"

The attractions of Abbots Cross were golf and nothing but golf.

"That is so," agreed Poirot. "Then, as far as you remember, Mademoiselle, nobody from here was out that night?"

"Captain England and his wife were out to dinner."

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Poirot shook his head.

"That is not the kind of thing I mean. I will try the other hotel; the Mitre, is it not?"

"Oh, the Mitre," said Miss Langdon. "Of course, anyone might have gone out walking from there."

The disparagement of her tone, though vague, was evident, and Poirot beat a tactful retreat.

Ten minutes later he was repeating the scene, this time with Miss Cole, the brusque manageress of the Mitre, a less pretentious hotel with lower prices, situated close to the station.

"There was one gentleman out late that night, came in about half-past twelve, as far as I can remember. Quite a habit of his it was, to go out for a walk at that time of the evening. He had done it once or twice before. Let me see now, what was his name? Just for the moment I can't remember it."

She pulled a large ledger toward her and began turning over the pages.

"Nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first, twenty-second. Ah, here we are. Naylor, Captain Humphrey Naylor."

"He had stayed here before? You know him well?"

"Once before," said Miss Cole, "about a fortnight earlier. He went out then in the evening, I remember."

"He came to play golf, eh?"

"I suppose so," said Miss Cole; "that's what most of the gentlemen come for."

"Very true," said Poirot. "Well, Mademoiselle, I thank you infinitely, and I wish you good day."

He went back to Mon Repos with a very thoughtful face. Once or twice he drew something from his pocket and looked at it.

"It must be done," he murmured to himself, "and soon, as soon as I can make the opportunity."

His first proceeding on re-entering the house was to ask Parsons where Miss Margrave might be found. He was told that she was in the small study dealing with Lady Astwell's correspondence, and the information seemed to afford Poirot satisfaction.

He found the little study without difficulty. Lily Margrave was seated at a desk by the window, writing. But for her the room was empty. Poirot carefully shut the door behind him and came toward the girl.

"I may have a little minute of your time, Mademoiselle, you will be so kind?"

"Certainly."

Lily Margrave put the papers aside and turned toward him.

"What can I do for you?"

"On the evening of the tragedy, Mademoiselle, I understand that when Lady Astwell went to her husband you went straight up to bed. Is that so?"

Lily Margrave nodded.

"You did not come down again, by any chance?"

The girl shook her head.

"I think you said, Mademoiselle, that you had not at any time that evening been in the Tower room?"

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"I don't remember saying so, but as a matter of fact that is quite true. I was not in the Tower room that evening."

Poirot raised his eyebrows.

"Curious," he murmured.

"What do you mean?"

"Very curious," murmured Hercule Poirot again. "How do you account, then, for this?"

He drew from his pocket a little scrap of stained green chiffon and held it up for the girl's inspection.

Her expression did not change, but he felt rather than heard the sharp intake of breath.

"I don't understand, M. Poirot."

"You wore, I understand, a green chiffon dress that evening, Mademoiselle. This" — he tapped the scrap in his fingers — "was torn from it."

"And you found it in the Tower room?" asked the girl sharply. "Whereabouts?"

Hercule Poirot looked at the ceiling.

"For the moment shall we just say — in the Tower room?"

For the first time, a look of fear sprang into the girl's eyes. She began to speak, then checked herself. Poirot watched her small white hands clenching themselves on the edge of the desk.

"I wonder if I did go into the Tower room that evening?" she mused. "Before dinner, I mean. I don't think so. I am almost sure I didn't. If that scrap has been in the Tower room all this time, it seems to me a very extraordinary thing the police did not find it right away."

"The police," said the little man, "do not think of the things that Hercule Poirot thinks of."

"I may have run in there for a minute just before dinner," mused Lily Margrave, "or it may have been the night before. I wore the same dress then. Yes, I am almost sure it was the night before."

"I think not," said Poirot evenly.

"Why?"

He only shook his head slowly from side to side.

"What do you mean?" whispered the girl.

She was leaning forward, staring at him, all the color ebbing out of her face.

"You do not notice, Mademoiselle, that this fragment is stained? There is no doubt about it, that stain is human blood."

"You mean ——?"

"I mean, Mademoiselle, that you were in the Tower room *after* the crime was committed, not before. I think you will do well to tell me the whole truth, lest worse should befall you."

He stood up now, a stern little figure of a man, his forefinger pointed accusingly at the girl.

"How did you find out?" gasped Lily.

"No matter, Mademoiselle. I tell you Hercule Poirot *knows*. I know all about Captain Humphrey Naylor, and that you went down to meet him that night."

(*to be concluded next month*)

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Writing in the "New Statesman and Nation," of May 7, 1949, J. B. Priestley tells of a short visit he made to Stratford-on-Avon. First, he rhapsodizes on the landscape — "I never saw the countryside looking better . . . bright with Japanese flowering cherry trees . . . the balanced green and brown masses and the melting blue distances of the old water-colours . . . the Cotswold stone soaked in sunlight . . . Shallow's orchard, with Cousin Silence invisible beneath the fleecy branches. By Heaven — what a country! . . . It was the journey, not the end of it, that was Shakespearean. We might have been looking over his shoulder."

Now, what do you think Shakespeare Town suggested to so eminent a playwright and novelist as Mr. Priestley? An historical drama? A sonnet sequence? It was Mr. Priestley's first visit to Stratford in "at least ten years," yet to his creative mind came, of all things — but let the author of THE GOOD COMPANIONS *and* LABURNUM GROVE *speak for himself:*

"A good detective story might be written about a scholar, deep in Elizabethan research, who is mysteriously murdered. After the police retire from the case, baffled, the eccentric private detective proves that the murderer was an emissary of the Stratford Town Council, whose spies had learned that the scholar was about to prove once and for all that Shakespeare had not written the plays attributed to him."

Ah, what a spur to the creative impulses is the theme of detection! Indeed, if Shakespeare were alive today, it is more than probable that even he, the greatest of them all, would still be preoccupied with the enduring verities — madness and murder. And inspired by sciences which were not yet born in his time, would not the good Will have followed through? For in real life today (and surely Will would have remained a realist) is not dementia dogged by diagnosis? And hard on the heels of homicide do we not have the modern manhunter? And so in literature . . .

WHAT A LIFE!

by J. B. PRIESTLEY

IT WAS one of those hotels that are called "quiet hotels for gentlefolk." Apparently, gentlefolk have a passion for an atmosphere of dinginess and slight decay. This hotel, like many of its kind, had two lounges: one at the front, in which people merely waited for one another and for the telephone, and one at the back, the "Brown Lounge," in which

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a number of large pieces of furniture and some gigantic steel engravings waited for the Day of Judgment. It has been often suggested that there should be public lethal chambers for those unfortunates who are bent on suicide. This "Brown Lounge" would make an excellent lethal chamber, for, even as it is, once inside it your thoughts turn naturally to the end of this life. Only young and bold spirits could withstand its insidious melancholy. There are two of them in there now.

"What time does the show start?" said the first young man, who was staying at the hotel. He was engaged in manufacturing motor cars in a provincial town and did not often visit London.

"Half-past eight," said the other young man, who lived in London and was uproariously in the publicity business.

"Just time for a drink, then," said the other, ringing the bell.

After a minute or two a waiter appeared, a vague, oldish chap, the sort of waiter you expect to find in that sort of hotel.

"Two whiskies," said the first young man.

"Two whiskies, sir," the waiter replied, in a colorless voice. "Yes, sir." And drifted away.

The second young man yawned and then glanced round the room. "What the devil made you come here?" he demanded. "It's a ghastly hole."

"Pretty dismal, I admit. Fellow at the works, one of our designers, said he'd stayed here and it was all right, fairly cheap, and quiet at night."

"Quiet! It's dead and buried. Still, I suppose you're out most of the time."

"Gosh, yes. If I wasn't I'd try something livelier than this," the visitor replied, as the waiter returned with the drinks. "Thanks. How much? Here you are, and keep the change."

"Thank you, sir," said the waiter.

"Very quiet here, waiter."

"Very quiet just now, sir." And the waiter picked up his tray and departed.

"I suppose that poor devil will spend the rest of the night waiting for somebody to come in."

"He will," said the second young man. "Not exactly a whirl of excitement, eh? What a life!"

"What a life!"

"Well, cheerio!"

"Cheerio! I suppose we'd better push off if we want to see that show."

They swallowed their drinks and pushed off, leaving two little glasses in the wilderness of the lounge, which sank into deepest quiet and melancholy again.

It was some time, however, before the waiter cleared away those two glasses. He was not very busy and he was not, as a rule, neglectful of his duty, but it happened that he had been waiting for the telephone bell to ring for him, and it rang before he returned to the lounge.

"Is it for me?" he inquired, eagerly, and for the fifth time that evening.

The reception clerk, who knew what it was all about, nodded, and regarded him sympathetically. "I'll put

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it right through to the staff room."

There was nothing colorless about his voice now, as he answered the call. It was not the voice of a waiter at all, and there was a terrible urgency in it. As he spoke, a faint ring of moisture appeared just below the line of his graying hair.

"Hello, hello! Yes, that's me," he cried. "A daughter, eh? Yes, yes, that's all right. Is she? You're sure about that? Both of them? Did she say anything? Did she? Is that right? Oh, that's fine. Yes, of course. How soon? All right, then, I'll be round at ten in the morning. And thank you very much. Yes, I'm sure she is. Thank you. And tell her how glad I am, don't forget that. Yes, at ten."

After he had put down the receiver, he drew a long breath, waited a moment and wiped his forehead, then went back to the office. "It's all right," he said to the reception clerk. "I've finished."

"What's the news?" that young lady inquired.

"A daughter, and they're both doing fine."

"That's good. What's the baby like?"

"Only a little one — six pounds and a bit," replied the waiter.

"The little ones are nearly always the best. That's what my cousin says, and she does maternity work. Well, you're a grandfather now."

"So I am," said the waiter. "I never thought of that. An hour ago I was just a father, and now I'm a grandfather. That's queer, you know."

"It's a queer world, that's what I always say. Let me see, haven't I met your daughter? Hasn't she been round here to see you once or twice?"

"That's the one," said the waiter, and there was a distinct note of pride in his voice. It suggested that the baby had been lucky to find such a mother, that he had been lucky to have such a daughter, and that even the reception clerk had been lucky in merely meeting such a girl. A proud grandfather, a partly relieved though still anxious father, the waiter now withdrew, to think things over. It had been his job to see his daughter through this queer and difficult time. It was her first baby, and her husband, a good lad but not quite as steady as he might be, was now trying his hand at being a steward on a big cargo boat, and at this moment was somewhere off Sydney. If you had seen the waiter clearing away those two glasses in the Brown Lounge, you would not have realized that his forehead was still damp with perspiration and that his head was humming with plans.

Nothing happened in the Brown Lounge until a little after nine. Then the massive sideboard, the grim armchairs, and the sad steel engravings were disturbed by the entrance of a woman in a rather dubious fur coat. She still carried with her, at once defiantly and anxiously, the red and bronze remains of somewhat hard good looks. She belonged to that mysterious class of women who are often found behaving "like perfect

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ladies" in places that perfect ladies usually contrive to avoid. Once inside the lounge, this woman rang the bell and then made several movements that suggested, with truth, that she was in an agitated state of mind.

The bell was answered by our friend the waiter. He came in as a waiter, but the moment he saw who it was that had rung the bell, all the waiterishness departed from him and he looked what he was — namely, a surprised, annoyed middle-aged man.

"What do *you* want?" he asked.

"Wanted to talk to you, Joe," the woman replied, promptly, "and I thought the easiest way would be to come in here and not go asking for you at the back. Nobody'll come in, will they?"

"They might."

"Yes, and then they might not," she retorted.

"Well?"

"Listen, Joe," she said, in a very different tone of voice, "what about Alice? How's she getting on?"

"Who told you about Alice?"

"What's it matter who told me? If you want to know, I saw Mrs. Brewer, and she told me you'd told her Alice was going to have a baby. Joe, tell me — what's happened? Is it all right?"

The waiter was silent for a moment.

The woman gave a little yelp of impatience, then seized his arm and shook it. "Come on. Don't stand there like that. What is it? My God, if she's ——"

"She's all right, at least so far she is," he told her, curtly. "It happened tonight and she's doing well."

"What is it?"

"A girl."

"A girl!" the woman cried, with a little emotional gulp. "A girl! Poor little devil! And they're all right?"

"They're both all right."

The woman laughed, not very pleasantly. "And now I'm a grandmother. My God! — think of that. Grannie! That puts the years on you, doesn't it? But never mind about that. Listen, Joe — and I'm serious now — I've got to see her. Where is she?"

"Don't you worry. She's all right."

"Don't be a fool, Joe. I've got to see her now. Where is she?"

"I've told you — she's all right. I'm looking after her."

"Do you mean you're not going to let me see her now?" The woman's voice rose almost to a scream.

"Not so much noise," he told her.

"What do I care how much noise I make! You've got to tell me where Alice is and I've got to see her. I'm her mother, aren't I?"

"You ought to have thought about that a long time ago, before you decided to let some of the flash fellows keep you." The waiter was very grim now. He kept his eyes fixed on those of the woman standing in front of him. They were hard blue eyes that he saw there; and he knew them only too well, especially in this mood of rising anger, heading towards either tears or screams and curses; and as he stared at them it occurred to him that it was very odd that they should be the eyes of a woman whose name

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was still his, who was still his wife. They had made no attempt to live together for the last ten years, but they had not been divorced. He did not want to marry again, and she did not seem to find it difficult to call herself Mrs. This and then Mrs. That.

"You always was a mean devil, Joe," his wife proclaimed.

"Yes," he put in, hastily, bitterly, "I've no doubt you've found 'em not so mean where you've been since."

"Well, if you want to know, I have. Now, look here, Joe. I'm the girl's mother, and this is the time when a girl wants to see her mother, and I'm going to see her. Where is she?"

"I'm not going to tell you, and you're not going to see her. Leave her alone. She doesn't want you, and I don't — I only want you to be a long way off."

"Don't worry, I'm not after *you*. You never was any catch at any time, and you're not one now, I can tell you. But I've a right to see my own child. She's my daughter."

"Not now, she isn't," the waiter told her. "You've done. I'll see to that."

"You'll see to a lot, won't you?" she jeered. "One thing's certain, though. She's my daughter. She might be yours, and then she might not."

"What!" He shot out a hand, and it fastened on her wrist. "What're you trying to tell me now? What's the idea?" He was really ferocious now, unlike any respectable waiter.

This sudden ferocity left the woman uneasy. She wrenched her arm away, and then said, hastily: "Oh, don't be a fool, Joe. You know very well she was yours, all right. Where is she? I only want to see her and the baby together. What's the harm in that?"

"That's my business. I've not interfered with you, so don't you interfere with me. You've gone your own way, so just keep to it. And leave Alice alone. I warn you — leave her alone."

At this moment, while they were still glaring at one another, somebody came quietly into the room. She was a tiny old woman, all rings and brooches and lilac silk and black satin, and the waiter knew her well, for she came up from the country regularly.

"There you are, waiter," she said, nodding and smiling at him. "Now I needn't ring, need I? Could you get me a nice cup of tea, just a cup?"

"Cup of tea? Certainly, m'," said the waiter, and without another glance at his wife, he walked out. When he came back five minutes later, his wife had disappeared.

"You know, waiter," the old lady remarked as he set the tea before her, "some people say tea at night keeps you awake, but I don't find it so. I don't like to go to bed without my cup of tea."

"All a matter of habit, m'."

"I expect it is," said the old lady.

"I'm sure it is. I like a cup myself."

The old lady, who was a friendly soul, nodded brightly at this, and kept him there a minute or two longer while she told him how long she had been having her late cup and what various relations thought about it.

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And when she had done, she gave him a sixpenny tip, which was very handsome for a single cup of tea. The waiter could not help reflecting how surprised she would have been if she had learned that the woman who had just gone out was the waiter's wife and a good many other things besides.

Twenty minutes later the bell in the lounge rang again, and the waiter found that the old lady, now sitting in a dream over her empty cup, had company in the shape of a bulky, florid-faced fellow who was smoking a cigar. He looked at the waiter and gave him a tiny knowing grin. The waiter stared for a moment, then promptly relapsed into blank waiterdom.

"Yes, sir?"

"Oh — yes — er — let me see, waiter. I think I'll have a double Scotch and a small soda. I'm not staying here, but that's all right, isn't it? I want to see somebody here." He put a curious emphasis into this last.

"That's all right," the waiter muttered, removing the old lady's cup.

"What time is it?" the old lady inquired.

Before the waiter could reply, the newcomer, with a flourish, had taken out a heavy gold watch, and replied: "Five minutes to ten."

"Thank you. Time for me to go to bed, then," she told them both; and the waiter held the door open for her and then retired to get the whisky.

"Two and tenpence," said the waiter, the moment after he had placed the drink in front of the visitor.

The bulky, florid-faced man grinned, and then, with a careful and rather praiseworthy attempt at complete nonchalance, remarked: "You're not going to stand me this one, Joe?"

"I'm not."

The other handed over three shillings. "Keep the change," he cried, giving a creditable burlesque of a generous visitor.

The waiter said nothing, but merely swept the coins into his pocket and began moving away.

"Wait a minute, Joe, wait a minute. It's no use pretending not to know me."

"Oh, I knew you all right, Dobby," said the waiter, as he stopped and turned. "But what of it?"

"I told you just now I came in here to see somebody. Well, you're him."

"How did you know I was here?" the waiter asked.

"I ran into Maggie not half a mile away," the bulky man explained, with a flowing gesture, "and she told me she'd just been having a little talk with you in here. Full of it, she was. You ought to have heard her, Joe. It's a long time since I met Maggie — I mean before tonight — but she's not changed a bit. Still got a lively tongue in her head. Cor! — you ought to have heard her going on about you, Joe. I tell you what it is — you can't handle women, Joe. You never could."

"You didn't come here to tell me that, did you, Dobby?" the waiter inquired. "Because if you did, you're wasting your valuable time." And he

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made another move as if to depart.

"Just a minute, Joe. Don't be so impatient. I came in here to have a look at you, Joe, in your nice waiter's clothes, and I also came in here just to have a look around. Nice quiet hotel, Joe, very nice quiet hotel this. Not the sort of place where anybody would expect any trouble. The police don't worry you much here, Joe, do they? I shouldn't think they would. Very nice and quiet — and gentlemanly."

"Cut it short, Dobby."

Dobby grinned again. He appeared to be enjoying himself. "Well, Joe, if you want it short, you shall have it short. Now I've got a little scheme. I won't tell you what it is now, but you know my little schemes — you've met 'em before, haven't you, Joe? And for this little scheme I want a nice quiet place to stay in for a week or two, just like this, and so I thought I'd stay here and then you could help me, couldn't you, Joe?"

"Nothing doing," the waiter announced.

"Now don't be hasty, Joe. You don't know what it is you've got to do."

"And I don't want to know. But understand this, Dobby — you don't let me in for it and you don't try anything on here."

"Oh, I don't, eh?" The bulky man seemed to be amused.

The waiter was not amused. He was very grim, and there was a curious strained look about his eyes. He came a little nearer now, and though, when he spoke, he was quieter than he had been before, there was a very unpleasant quality in his voice. "You know very well I'm running straight now, Dobby. You're not going to try anything on here, and that's flat."

"Going back on your old friends, eh, Joe? Do you think that's wise?"

"I've told you," said the waiter. "I'm running straight now."

"A nice respectable waiter in a nice respectable hotel. That's the line, is it, Joe?"

Dobby looked at his cigar, put it down, then finished his whisky in one big gulp. He looked up. "It's no good coming the high and mighty with me, Joe, and you know it. How did you get this job? Never mind. I don't want to know. But I'll bet they don't know here that you're an old lag."

The waiter tried to moisten his lips. "They don't," he admitted.

"Of course they don't. Nice respectable, gentlemanly hotel like this. What! — have an old lag as a waiter? Dear me, couldn't be done! A convicted ——"

"All right, all right," the waiter interrupted hastily.

"A word from me to the management and where's the nice job then?"

"You wouldn't do that, Dobby," the waiter cried.

"I don't want to do it, Joe, but if an old friend won't do a little job for me, quite a safe job, safe as houses, well, then, I might have to make trouble. And that would be very, very easy."

"Why can't you leave me alone? I'm not interfering with you. I've finished with your lot. I've had my

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medicine — and that's a damn' sight more than you've had yet, Dobby, don't forget that."

"Ah, you see, Joe, I'm not only lucky but I'm clever," Mr. Dobby protested airily. "I don't look it, I know. But I'm clever."

"I'm going straight. I earn what I make, and I'm interfering with nobody. For God's sake, leave me alone, Dobby."

"Can't do that, Joe. Sorry, but it can't be done. You can't go back on your old friends like that. If you help me with this little idea of mine, there's no trouble coming to you, nothing but a little present from an old friend. But if you're going to be awkward, Joe, you're not going to get away with it. We can't have you pretending to be respectable any longer. You're losing this job, see? And you won't get another in a hurry, will you? And then there's this daughter of yours who's just had the baby."

"You've got hold of that, too, have you?" said the waiter, bitterly. "Not much you miss, is there, Dobby?"

"Got it all from Maggie tonight. I tell you, Joe, when women are angry, they spill it all. You don't know how to manage 'em, Joe, and that's where you get yourself into trouble. Now what's it going to be? Are you going to be awkward or am I?"

The waiter came nearer still, very close indeed, leaning on the little table and gradually lowering his head. He looked monstrously unlike any possible waiter; a dangerous man. "Now you've got to listen to me a minute, Dobby," he began, in a tone that was hardly above a whisper. "It's taken me some time to get going. I'm all right here. But if you shop me, I'll have to go."

"Yes, and then — what?"

"I know. You needn't tell me. I'm telling you now. If you shop me, and they turn me off here, I've finished. It's taken me years to get as far as this, but it won't take five minutes to push me back again. I'm through then. But what about you, Dobby, what about you?"

"What d'you mean?" Mr. Dobby must have been feeling rather uneasy, for he was blustering a little now. "You can't shop me, Joe, and you needn't think it. Cleverer men than you have tried to do that, and they missed the bus all right."

The waiter produced what must have been the shortest and most unpleasant laugh ever heard in that room. He put out a hand, resting all his weight on the other, and though it was a waiter's hand, it was very large and powerful. "I sha'n't bother about that, Dobby," he whispered. "I'll do it all myself. I'll put you where you won't make any trouble again. I sha'n't have any work to do, and I sha'n't want any. I'll spend all my time looking for you, Dobby, and when I've found you, I'll make a good job of it."

Mr. Dobby was no longer as florid-looking as he had been before, but he tried to carry off the situation. "And that's been said before, and tried before, and it hasn't come off."

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"It will this time," said the waiter. "I sha'n't do it myself, either. There'll be two of us. I know where Raspy is. Raspy's out, y'know, Dobby."

"Raspy's out," the other admitted, uneasily. "But he's dead."

"He's not dead. I saw him, spoke to him, not two months since, and I know where he is now. He wants to meet you again, Dobby, but he thinks you're a long way off, in South America. You should hear what he says about you, Dobby, and what he'd like to do to you. And the minute I'm turned off here I'm going to Raspy, and then we'll come looking for you, Dobby. And I mean that. Leave me here and I'll interfere with nobody, but get me turned out into the street again and I'm a desperate man, see?"

"I see, Joe."

The waiter drew back from the table. "So just take your little schemes somewhere else, Dobby. You're not trying anything on here."

Mr. Dobby rose from his chair and made for the door. "All right, Joe. Keep on being a good boy. So long." He carried it off with his customary swagger, but there could be no denying that he had lost the rubber.

The waiter did not follow him out. He stood motionless for several minutes, breathing deeply, like a man who had just saved his skin only by the fraction of an inch. Then something seemed to happen to him; he shrank a little; the light died out of his eyes; certain lines vanished from his face; and, in fact, he turned into a middle-aged waiter again. There were a glass and an empty soda-water bottle to remove. He removed them.

"Well, here we are again," said the first young man.

"I'll push off in a minute, old man," said the second young man, seating himself on the arm of a chair. "I've a busy day tomorrow."

"You've time for a quick one."

And he rang the bell. The same old waiter appeared. "Two whiskies, please."

"Two whiskies, sir," the waiter replied, in a colorless voice. "Yes, sir."

The second young man yawned and then glanced round the room. "Don't stay in this hole again."

"Wait a minute," cried the first young man. "This room has actually had a customer or guest or visitor in it since we left. I smell cigar smoke and I see here the stump of a cigar. You know my methods, Watson."

"I can't believe it. I think the waiter must have come in and smoked it on the sly."

The waiter returned. "I'm going off duty now, sir, but if you want anything else, the night porter'll get it."

"Thanks, but I sha'n't. Here you are."

"Thank you, sir."

"Still very quiet here, waiter."

"Very quiet just now, sir." And the waiter picked up his tray and departed.

"Not a bad chap, that waiter, but — my hat! — what a life!"

"What a life! Well — cheerio!"

"Cheerio!"

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AS SIMPLE AS ABC

by ELLERY QUEEN

This is a very old story as Queen stories go. It happened in Ellery's salad days, when he was tossing his talents about like a Sunday chef, and a redheaded girl named Nikki Porter had just attached herself to his typewriter. But it has not staled, this story; it has an unwithering flavor which those who partook of it relish to this day. There are gourmets in America whose taste-buds leap at any concoction dated 1861–1865. To such, the mere recitation of ingredients like Bloody Angle, Minié balls, Little Mac, *Tenting Tonight*, the brand of General Grant's whiskey, not to mention Father Abraham, is sufficient to start the passionate flow of juices. These are the misty-hearted to whom the Civil War is "the War" and the blue-gray armies rather more than men. Romantics, if you will; garnishers of history. But it is they who pace the lonely sentrypost by the night Potomac, they who hear the creaking of the ammunition wagons, the snap of campfires, the scream of the thin gray line and the long groan of the battlefield. They personally flee the burning hell of the Wilderness as the dead rise and twist in the flames; under lanterns, in the flickering mud, they stoop compassionately with the surgeons over quivering heaps. It is they who keep the little flags flying and the ivy ever-green on the graves of the old men.

Ellery is of this company, and that is why he regards the case of the old men of Jacksburg, Pennsylvania, with particular affection.

Ellery and Nikki came upon the village of Jacksburg as people often come upon the best things, unpropitiously. They had been driving back to New York from Washington, where Ellery had done some sleuthing among the stacks of the Library of Congress. Perhaps the sight of the Potomac, Arlington's eternal geometry, Lincoln frozen in giant sadness, brought its weight to bear upon Ellery's decision to veer towards Gettysburg, where murder had been national. And Nikki had never been there, and May was coming to its end. There was a climate of sentiment.

They crossed the Maryland-Pennsylvania line and spent timeless hours wandering over Culp's Hill and Seminary Ridge and Little Round Top and Spangler's Spring among the watchful monuments. It is a place of everlasting life, where Pickett and Jeb Stuart keep charging to the sight of those with eyes to see, where the blood spills fresh if colorlessly, and the highpitched tones of a tall and ugly man still ring out over the graves. When they left, Ellery and Nikki were in a mood of wonder, unconscious of time or place, oblivious to the darkening sky and the direction in which the nose of the Duesen-

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berg pointed. So in time they were disagreeably awakened by the alarm clock of nature. The sky had opened on their heads, drenching them to the skin instantly. From the horizon behind them Gettysburg was a battlefield again, sending great flashes of fire through the darkness to the din of celestial cannon. Ellery stopped the car and put the top up, but the mood was drowned when he discovered that something ultimate had happened to the ignition system. They were marooned in a faraway land, Nikki moaned.

"We can't go on in these wet clothes, Ellery!"

"Do you suggest that we stay here in them? I'll get this crackerbox started if . . ." But at that moment the watery lights of a house wavered on somewhere ahead, and Ellery became cheerful again.

"At least we'll find out where we are and how far it is to where we ought to be. Who knows? There may even be a garage."

It was a little white house on a little swampy road marked off by a little stone fence covered with rambler rose vines, and the man who opened the door to the dripping wayfarers was little, too, little and weatherskinned and gallused, with eyes that seemed to have roots in the stones and springs of the Pennsylvania countryside. They smiled hospitably, but the smile became concern when he saw how wet they were.

"Won't take no for an answer," he said in a remarkably deep voice, and he chuckled. "That's doctor's orders, though I expect you didn't see my shingle — mostly overgrown with ivy. Got a change of clothing?"

"Oh, yes!" said Nikki abjectly.

Ellery, being a man, hesitated. The house looked neat and clean, there was an enticing fire, and the rain at their backs was coming down with a roar. "Well, thank you . . . but if I might use your phone to call a garage —"

"You just give me the keys to your car trunk."

"But we can't turn your home into a tourist house —"

"It's that, too, when the good Lord sends a wanderer my way. Now see here, this storm's going to keep up most of the night and the roads hereabout get mighty soupy." The little man was bustling into waterproofs and overshoes. "I'll get Lew Bagley over at the garage to pick up your car, but for now let's have those keys."

So an hour later, while the elements warred outside, they were toasting safely in a pleasant little parlor, full of Dr. Martin Strong's homemade poppy-seed twists, scrapple, and coffee. The doctor, who lived alone, was his own cook. He was also, he said with a chuckle, mayor of the village of Jacksburg, and its chief of police.

"Lot of us in the village run double harness. Bill Yoder of the hardware store's our undertaker. Lew Bagley's also the fire chief. Ed MacShane —"

"Jacksburger-of-all-trades you may be, Dr. Strong," said Ellery, "but to

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me you'll always be primarily the Good Samaritan."

"Hallelujah," said Nikki.

"And make it Doc," said their host. "Why, it's just selfishness on my part, Mr. Queen. We're off the beaten track here, and you do get a hankering for a new face. I guess I know every dimple and wen on the five hundred and thirty-four in Jacksburg."

"I don't suppose your police chiefship keeps you very busy."

Doc Strong laughed. "Not any. Though last year —" His eyes puckered and he got up to poke the fire. "Did you say, Miss Porter, that Mr. Queen is sort of a detective?"

"Sort of a!" began Nikki. "Why, Dr. Strong, he's solved some simply unbeliev —"

"My father is an inspector in the New York police department," interrupted Ellery, curbing his new secretary's enthusiasm with an iron glance. "I stick my nose into a case once in a while. What about last year, Doc?"

"What put me in mind of it," said Jacksburg's mayor thoughtfully, "was your saying you'd been to Gettysburg today. And also you being interested in crimes . . ." Dr. Strong said abruptly, "I'm a fool, but I'm worried."

"Worried about what?"

"Well . . . Memorial Day's tomorrow, and for the first time in my life I'm not looking forward to it. Jacksburg makes quite a fuss about Memorial Day. It's not every village can brag about three living veterans of the Civil War."

"Three!" exclaimed Nikki.

"Gives you an idea what the Jacksburg doctoring business is like," grinned Doc Strong. "We run to pioneer-type women and longevity . . . I ought to have said we *had* three Civil War veterans — Caleb Atwell, ninety-seven, of the Atwell family, there are dozens of 'em in the county; Zach Bigelow, ninety-five, who lives with his grandson Andy and Andy's wife and seven kids; and Abner Chase, ninety-four, Cissy Chase's great-grandpa. This year we're down to two. Caleb Atwell died last Memorial Day."

"A,B,C," murmured Ellery.

"What's that?"

"I have a bookkeeper's mind, Doc. Atwell, Bigelow, and Chase. Call it a spur-of-the-moment mnemonic system. A died last Memorial Day. Is that why you're not looking forward to this one? B following A sort of thing?"

"Didn't it always?" said Doc Strong with defiance. "Though I'm afraid it ain't — isn't as simple as all that. Maybe I better tell you how Caleb Atwell died . . . Every year Caleb, Zach, and Abner have been the star performers of our Memorial Day exercises, which are held at the old burying ground on the Hookerstown road. The oldest —"

"That would be A. Caleb Atwell."

"That's right. As the oldest, Caleb always blew taps on a cracked old bugle that came from their volunteer

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regiment. And Zach Bigelow, as the next oldest to Caleb Atwell, he'd be the standard bearer, and Ab Chase, as the next-next oldest, he'd lay the wreath on the memorial monument in the burying ground.

"Well, last Memorial Day, while Zach was holding the regimental colors and Ab the wreath, Caleb blew taps the way he'd been doing nigh onto twenty times before. All of a sudden, in the middle of a high note, Caleb keeled over. Dropped in his tracks. Deader than church on Monday."

"Strained himself," said Nikki sympathetically. "But what a poetic way for a Civil War veteran to die."

Doc Strong regarded her oddly. "Maybe," he said. "If you like that kind of poetry." He kicked a log, sending red sparks flying.

"But surely, Doc," said Ellery with a smile, for he was young in those days, "surely you can't have been suspicious about the death of a man of ninety-seven?"

"Maybe I was," muttered their host. "Maybe I was because it so happened I'd given old Caleb a thorough physical check-up only the day before he died. I'd have staked my medical license he'd live to break a hundred and then some. Healthiest old copperhead I ever knew. Copperhead! I'm blaspheming the dead. Caleb lost an eye at Second Bull Run . . . I know — I'm senile. That's what I've been telling myself."

"Just what was it you suspected, Doc?" Ellery forbore to smile now, but only because of Dr. Strong's evident distress.

"Didn't know what to suspect," said the country doctor shortly. "Fooled around with the notion of an autopsy, but the Atwells wouldn't hear of it. Said I was a blame jackass to think a man of ninety-seven would die of anything but old age. I found myself agreeing with 'em. The upshot was we buried Caleb whole."

"But Doc, at that age the human economy can go to pieces without warning like the one-hoss shay. You must have had another reason for uneasiness. A motive you knew about?"

"Well . . . maybe."

"He was a rich man," said Nikki.

"He didn't have a pot he could call his own," said Doc Strong. "But somebody stood to gain by his death just the same. That is, if the old yarn's true . . . You see, there's been kind of a legend in Jacksburg about those three old fellows, Mr. Queen. I first heard it when I was running around barefoot with my tail hanging out. Folks said then, and they're still saying it, that back in '65 Caleb and Zach and Ab, who were in the same company, found some sort of treasure."

"Treasure . . ." Nikki began to cough.

"Treasure," repeated Doc Strong doggedly. "Fetched it home to Jacksburg with them, the story goes, hid it, and swore they'd never tell a living soul where it was buried. Now there's lots of tales like that came out of the

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War —" he fixed Nikki with a stern and glittering eye "— and most folks either cough or go into hysterics, but there's something about this one I've always half-believed. So I'm senile on two counts. Just the same, I'll breathe a lot easier when tomorrow's ceremonies are over and Zach Bigelow lays Caleb Atwell's bugle away till next year. As the oldest survivor Zach does the tootling tomorrow."

"They hid the treasure and kept it hidden for considerably over half a century?" Ellery was smiling again. "Doesn't strike me as a very sensible thing to do with a treasure, Doc. It's only sensible if the treasure is imaginary. Then you don't have to produce it."

"The story goes," mumbled Jacksburg's mayor, "that they'd sworn an oath —"

"Not to touch any of it until they all died but one," said Ellery, laughing outright now. "Last-survivor-takes-all Department. Doc, that's the way most of these fairy tales go." Ellery rose, yawning. "I think I hear the featherbed in that other guest room calling. Nikki, your eyeballs are hanging out. Take my advice, Doc, and follow suit. You haven't a thing to worry about but keeping the kids quiet tomorrow while you read the Gettysburg Address!"

As it turned out, the night shared prominently in Doc Martin Strong's Memorial Day responsibilities. Ellery and Nikki awakened to a splendid world, risen from its night's ablutions with a shining eye and a scrubbed look; and they went downstairs within seconds of each other to find the mayor of Jacksburg puttering about the kitchen.

"Morning, morning," said Doc Strong, welcoming but abstracted. "Just fixing things for your breakfast before catching an hour's nap."

"You lamb," said Nikki. "But what a shame, Doctor. Didn't you sleep well last night?"

"Didn't sleep at all. Tossed around a bit and just as I was dropping off my phone rings and it's Cissy Chase. Emergency sick call."

"Cissy Chase." Ellery looked at their host. "Wasn't Chase the name you mentioned last night —?"

"Old Abner Chase's great-granddaughter. That's right, Mr. Queen. Cissy's an orphan and Ab's only kin. She's kept house for the old fellow and taken care of him since she was ten." Doc Strong's shoulders sloped.

Ellery said peculiarly: "It was old Abner . . . ?"

"I was up with Ab all night. This morning, at six thirty, he passed away."

"On Memorial Day!" Nikki sounded like a little girl in her first experience with a fact of life.

There was a silence, fretted by the sizzling of Doc Strong's bacon.

Ellery said at last, "What did Abner Chase die of?"

"Apoplexy."

"A stroke?"

Doc Strong looked at him. He seemed angry. But then he shook his

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head. "I'm no Mayo brother, Mr. Queen, and I suppose there's a lot about the practice of medicine I'll never get to learn, but I do know a cerebral hemorrhage when I see one, and that's what Ab Chase died of. In a man of ninety-four, that's as close to natural death as you can come . . . No, there wasn't any funny business in this one."

"Except," mumbled Ellery, "that — again — it happened on Memorial Day."

"Man's a contrary animal. Tell him lies and he swallows 'em whole. Give him the truth and he gags on it. Maybe the Almighty gets tired of His thankless job every once in an eon and cuts loose with a little joke." But Doc Strong said it as if he were addressing, not them, but himself. "Any special way you like your eggs?"

"Leave the eggs to me, Doctor," Nikki said firmly. "You go on up those stairs and get some sleep."

"Reckon I better if I'm to do my usual dignified job today," said the mayor of Jacksburg with a sigh. "Though Abner Chase's death is going to make the proceedings solemner than ordinary. Bill Yoder says he's not going to be false to an ancient and honorable profession by doing a hurry-up job undertaking Ab, and maybe that's just as well. If we added the Chase funeral to today's program, even old Abe's immortal words would find it hard to compete! By the way, Mr. Queen, I talked to Lew Bagley this morning and he'll have your car ready in an hour. Special service, seeing you're guests of the mayor." Doc Strong chuckled. "When you planning to leave?"

"I *was* intending . . ." Ellery stopped with a frown. Nikki regarded him with a sniffish look. She had already learned to detect the significance of certain signs peculiar to the Queen physiognomy. "I wonder," murmured Ellery, "how Zach Bigelow's going to take the news."

"He's already taken it, Mr. Queen. Stopped in at Andy Bigelow's place on my way home. Kind of a detour, but I figured I'd better break the news to Zach early as possible."

"Poor thing," said Nikki. "I wonder how it feels to learn you're the only one left." She broke an egg.

"Can't say Zach carried on about it," said Doc Strong dryly. "About all he said, as I recall, was: 'Doggone it, now who's goin' to lay the wreath after I toot the bugle!' I guess when you reach the age of ninety-five, death don't mean what it does to young squirts of sixty-three like me. What time'd you say you were leaving, Mr. Queen?"

"Nikki," muttered Ellery, "are we in any particular hurry?"

"I don't know. Are we?"

"Besides, it wouldn't be patriotic. Doc, do you suppose Jacksburg would mind if a couple of New York Yanks invited themselves to your Memorial Day exercises?"

The business district of Jacksburg consisted of a single paved street bounded at one end by the sightless

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eye of a broken traffic signal and at the other by the twin gas pumps before Lew Bagley's garage. In between, some stores in need of paint sunned themselves, enjoying the holiday. Red, white, and blue streamers criss-crossed the thoroughfare overhead. A few seedy frame houses, each decorated with an American flag, flanked the main street at both ends.

Ellery and Nikki found the Chase house exactly where Doc Strong had said it would be — just around the corner from Bagley's garage, between the ivy-hidden church and the firehouse of the Jacksburg Volunteer Pump and Hose Company No. 1. But the mayor's directions were a superfluity; it was the only house with a crowded porch.

A heavy-shouldered young girl in a black Sunday dress sat in a rocker, the center of the crowd. Her nose was as red as her big hands, but she was trying to smile at the cheerful words of sympathy winged at her from all sides.

"Thanks, Mis' Plumm . . . That's right, Mr. Schmidt, I know . . . But he was such a spry old soul, Emerson, I can't believe . . ."

"Miss Cissy Chase?"

Had the voice been that of a Confederate spy, a deeper silence could not have drowned the noise. Jacksburg eyes examined Ellery and Nikki with cold curiosity, and feet shuffled.

"My name is Queen and this is Miss Porter. We're attending the Jacksburg Memorial Day exercises as guests of Mayor Strong —" a warming murmur, like a zephyr, passed over the porch "— and he asked us to wait here for him. I'm sorry about your great-grandfather."

"You must have been very proud of him," said Nikki.

"Thank you, I was. It was so sudden — Won't you set? I mean — Do come into the house. Great-grandpa's not here . . . he's over at Bill Yoder's . . ."

The girl was flustered and began to cry, and Nikki took her arm and led her into the house. Ellery lingered a moment to exchange appropriate remarks with the neighbors who, while no longer cold, were still curious; and then he followed. It was a dreary little house, with a dark and musty-smelling parlor.

"Now, now, this is no time for fussing — may I call you Cissy?" Nikki was saying soothingly. "Besides, you're better off away from all those folks. Why, Ellery, she's only a child!"

And a very plain child, Ellery thought, with a pinched face and empty eyes.

"I understand the parade to the burying ground is going to form outside your house, Cissy," he said. "By the way, have Andrew Bigelow and his grandfather Zach arrived yet?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Cissy Chase dully. "It's all like such a dream, seems like."

"Of course it does. And you're left alone. Haven't you any family at all, Cissy?"

"No."

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"Isn't there some young man —?"

Cissy shook her head bitterly. "Who'd marry me? This is the only decent dress I got, and it's four years old. We lived on great-grandpa's pension and what I could earn hiring out by the day. Which ain't much, nor often. Now . . ."

"I'm sure you'll find something to do," said Nikki, very heartily.

"In Jacksburg?"

Nikki was silent.

"Cissy." Ellery spoke casually, and she did not even look up. "Doc Strong mentioned something about a treasure. Do you know anything about it?"

"Oh, that." Cissy shrugged. "Just what great-grandpa told me, and he hardly ever told the same story twice. But near as I was ever able to make out, one time during the War him and Caleb Atwell and Zach Bigelow got separated from the army — scouting, or foraging, or something. It was down South somewhere, and they spent the night in an old empty mansion that was half-burned down. Next morning they went through the ruins to see what they could pick up, and buried in the cellar they found the treasure. A big fortune in money, great-grandpa said. They were afraid to take it with them, so they buried it in the same place in the cellar and made a map of the location and after the War they went back, the three of 'em, and dug it up again. Then they made the pact."

"Oh, yes," said Ellery. "The pact."

"Swore they'd hold onto the treasure till only one of them remained alive, I don't know why, then the last one was to get it all. Leastways, that's how great-grandpa told it."

"Did he ever say how much of a fortune it was?"

Cissy laughed. "Couple of hundred thousand dollars. I ain't saying great-grandpa was cracked, but you know how an old man gets."

"Did he ever give you a hint as to where he and Caleb and Zach hid the money after they got it back North?"

"No, he'd just slap his knee and wink at me."

"Maybe," said Ellery suddenly, "maybe there's something to that yarn after all."

Nikki stared. "But Ellery, you said — ! Cissy, did you hear that?"

But Cissy only drooped. "If there is, it's all Zach Bigelow's now."

Then Doc Strong came in, fresh as a daisy in a pressed blue suit and a stiff collar and a bow tie, and a great many other people came in, too. Ellery and Nikki surrendered Cissy Chase to Jacksburg.

"If there's anything to the story," Nikki whispered to Ellery, "and if Mayor Strong is right, then that old scoundrel Bigelow's been murdering his friends to get the money!"

"After all these years, Nikki? At the age of ninety-five?" Ellery shook his head.

"But then what — ?"

"I don't know." And Ellery fell silent. But his glance went to Doc Strong and waited; and when the little mayor happened to look their

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way, Ellery caught his eye and took him aside and whispered in his ear. . . .

The procession — nearly every car in Jacksburg, Doc Strong announced proudly, over a hundred of them — got under way at exactly two o'clock.

Nikki had been embarrassed but not surprised to find herself being handed into the leading car, an old but brightly polished touring job contributed for the occasion by Lew Bagley; and the moment Nikki spied the ancient, doddering head under the Union army hat in the front seat she detected the fine Italian whisper of her employer. Zach Bigelow held his papery frame fiercely if shakily erect between the driver and a powerful red-necked man with a brutal face who, Nikki surmised, was the old man's grandson, Andy Bigelow. Nikki looked back, peering around the flapping folds of the flag stuck in the corner of the car. Cissy Chase was in the second car in a black veil, weeping on a stout woman's shoulder. So the female Yankee from New York sat back between Ellery and Mayor Strong, against the bank of flowers in which the flag was set, and glared at the necks of the two Bigelows, having long since taken sides in this matter. And when Doc Strong made the introductions, Nikki barely nodded to Jacksburg's sole survivor of the Grand Army of the Republic, and then only in acknowledgment of his historic importance.

Ellery, however, was all deference and cordiality, even to the brute grandson. He leaned forward.

"How do I address your grandfather, Mr. Bigelow?"

"Gramp's a general," said Andy Bigelow loudly. "Ain't you, Gramp?" He beamed at the ancient, but Zach Bigelow was staring proudly ahead, holding fast to something in a rotted musette bag on his lap. "Went through the War a private," the grandson confided, "but he don't like to talk about that."

"General Bigelow—"

"That's his deef ear," said the grandson. "Try the other one."

"General Bigelow!"

"Hey?" The old man turned his trembling head, glaring. "Speak up, bub. Ye're mumblin'."

"General Bigelow," shouted Ellery, "now that all the money is yours, what will you do with it?"

"Hey? Money?"

"The treasure, Gramp," roared Andy Bigelow. "They've even heard about it in New York. What you goin' to do with it, he wants to know?"

"Does, does he?" Old Zach sounded grimly amused. "Can't talk, Andy. Hurts m' neck."

"How much does it amount to, General?" cried Ellery.

Old Zach eyed him. "Mighty nosy, ain't ye?" Then he cackled. "Last time we counted it — Caleb, Ab, and me — came to nigh on a million dollars. Yes, sir, one million dollars." The old man's left eye, startlingly, drooped. "Goin' to be a big surprise

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to the smart-alecks and the doubtin' Thomases. You wait an' see."

"According to Cissy," Nikki murmured to Doc Strong, "Abner Chase said it was only two hundred thousand."

"Zach makes it more every time he talks about it," said the mayor.

"I heard ye, Martin Strong!" yelled Zach Bigelow, swiveling his twig of a neck so suddenly that Nikki winced, expecting it to snap. "You wait! I'll show ye, ye durn whippersnapper, who's a lot o' wind!"

"Now, Zach," said Doc Strong pacifyingly. "Save your wind for that bugle."

Zach Bigelow cackled and clutched the musette bag in his lap, glaring ahead in triumph, as if he had scored a great victory.

Ellery said no more. Oddly, he kept staring not at old Zach but at Andy Bigelow, who sat beside his grandfather grinning at invisible audiences along the empty countryside as if he, too, had won — or was on his way to winning — a triumph.

The sun was hot. Men shucked their coats and women fanned themselves with handkerchiefs.

"*It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated . . .*"

Children dodged among the graves, pursued by shushing mothers. On most of the graves were fresh flowers.

"*. . . that from these honored dead . . .*"

Little American flags protruded from the graves, too.

"*. . . gave the last full measure of devotion . . .*"

Doc Martin Strong's voice was deep and sure, not at all like the voice of that tall ugly man, who had spoken the same words apologetically.

"*. . . that these dead shall not have died in vain . . .*"

Doc was standing on the pedestal of the Civil War Monument, which was decorated with flags and bunting and faced the weathered stone ranks like a commander in full-dress.

"*. . . that this nation, under God . . .*"

A color guard of the American Legion, Jacksburg Post, stood at attention between the mayor and the people. A file of Legionnaires carrying old Sharps rifles faced the graves.

"*. . . and that government of the people . . .*"

Beside the mayor, disdaining the wrestler's shoulder of his simian grandson, stood General Zach Bigelow. Straight as the barrel of a Sharps, musette bag held tightly.

"*. . . shall not perish from the earth.*"

The old man nodded impatiently. He began to fumble with the bag.

"*Comp'ny! Present — arms!*"

"Go ahead, Gramp!" Andy Bigelow bellowed.

The old man muttered. He was having difficulty extricating the bugle from the bag.

"Here, lemme give ye a hand!"

"Let the old man alone, Andy," said the mayor of Jacksburg quietly. "We're in no hurry."

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Finally the bugle was free. It was an old army bugle, as old as Zach Bigelow, dented and scarred.

The old man raised it to his lips.

Now his hands were not shaking.

Now even the children were quiet.

And the old man began to play taps.

It could hardly have been called playing. He blew, and out of the bugle's bell came cracked sounds. And sometimes he blew and no sounds came out at all. Then the veins of his neck swelled and his face turned to burning bark. Or he sucked at the mouthpiece, in and out, to clear it of his spittle. But still he blew, and the trees in the burying ground nodded in the warm breeze, and the people stood at attention, listening, as if the butchery of sound were sweet music.

And then, suddenly, the butchery faltered. Old Zach Bigelow stood with bulging eyes. The bugle fell to the pedestal with a tinny clatter.

For an instant everything seemed to stop — the slight movements of the children, the breathing of the people.

Then into the vacuum rushed a murmur of horror, and Nikki unbelievingly opened the eyes which she had shut to glimpse the last of Jacksburg's G.A.R. veterans crumpling to the feet of Doc Strong and Andy Bigelow . . .

"You were right the first time, Doc," Ellery said.

They were in Andy Bigelow's house, where old Zach's body had been taken from the cemetery. The house was full of chittering women and scampering children, but in this room there were only a few, and they talked in low tones. The old man was laid out on a settee with a patchwork quilt over him. Doc Strong sat in a rocker beside the body.

"It's my fault," he mumbled. "I didn't examine Caleb's mouth last year. I didn't examine the mouthpiece of the bugle. It's my fault."

Ellery soothed him. "It's not an easy poison to spot, Doc, as you know. And after all, the whole thing was so ludicrous. You'd have caught it in autopsy, but the Atwells laughed you out of it."

"They're all gone. All three." Doc Strong looked up fiercely. "Who poisoned that bugle?"

"God Almighty, don't look at me," said Andy Bigelow. "Anybody could of, Doc."

"Anybody, Andy?" the mayor cried. "When Caleb Atwell died, Zach took the bugle and it's been in this house for a year!"

"Anybody could of," said Bigelow stubbornly. "The bugle was hangin' over the fireplace and anybody could of snuck in durin' the night . . . Anyway, it wasn't here before old Caleb died; *he* had it up to last Memorial Day. Who poisoned it in *his* house?"

"We won't get anywhere on this tack, Doc," Ellery murmured. "Bigelow. Did your grandfather ever let on where that Civil War treasure is?"

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"Suppose he did." The man licked his lips, blinking, as if he had been surprised into the half-admission. "What's it to you?"

"That money is behind the murders, Bigelow."

"Don't know nothin' about that. Anyway, nobody's got no right to that money but me." Andy Bigelow spread his thick chest. "When Ab Chase died, Gramp was the last survivor. That money was Zach Bigelow's. I'm his next o' kin, so now it's mine!"

"You know where it's hid, Andy." Doc was on his feet, eyes glittering.

"I ain't talkin'. Git outen my house!"

"I'm the law in Jacksburg, too, Andy," Doc said softly. "This is a murder case. Where's that money?"

Bigelow laughed.

"You didn't know, Bigelow, did you?" said Ellery.

"Course not." He laughed again. "See, Doc? He's on your side, and he says I don't know, too."

"That is," said Ellery, "until a few minutes ago."

Bigelow's grin faded. "What are ye talkin' about?"

"Zach Bigelow wrote a message this morning, immediately after Doc Strong told him about Abner Chase's death."

Bigelow's face went ashen.

"And your grandfather sealed the message in an envelope —"

"Who told ye that?" yelled Bigelow.

"One of your children. And the first thing you did when we got home from the burying ground with your grandfather's corpse was to sneak up to the old man's bedroom. Hand it over."

Bigelow made two fists. Then he laughed again. "All right, I'll let ye see it. Hell, I'll let ye dig the money up for me! Why not? It's mine by law. Here, read it. See? He wrote my name on the envelope!"

And so he had. And the message in the envelope was also written in ink, in the same wavering hand:

> "Dere Andy now that Ab Chase is ded to — if sumthin happins to me you wil find the money we been keepin all these long yeres in a iron box *in the coffin wich we beried Caleb Atwell in.* I leave it all to you my beluved grandson cuz you been sech a good grandson to me. Yours truly Zach Bigelow."

"In Caleb's coffin," choked Doc Strong.

Ellery's face was impassive. "How soon can you get an exhumation order, Doc?"

"Right now," exclaimed Doc. "I'm also deputy coroner of this district!"

And they took some men and they went back to the old burying ground, and in the darkening day they dug up the remains of Caleb Atwell and they opened the casket and found, on the corpse's knees, a flattish box of iron with a hasp but no lock. And while two strong men held Andy Bigelow to keep him from hurling

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himself at the crumbling coffin, Doctor-Mayor-Chief-of-Police-Deputy-Coroner Martin Strong held his breath and raised the lid of the box.

And it was crammed to the brim with moldy bills.

In Confederate money.

No one said anything for some time, not even Andy Bigelow.

Then Ellery said, "It stood to reason. They found it buried in the cellar of an old Southern mansion — would it be Northern greenbacks? When they dug it up again after the War and brought it up to Jacksburg they probably had some faint hope that it might have some value. When they realized it was worthless, they decided to have some fun with it. This has been a private joke of those three old rascals since, roughly, 1865. When Caleb died last Memorial Day, Abner and Zach probably decided that, as the first of the trio to go, Caleb ought to have the honor of being custodian of their Confederate treasure in perpetuity. So one of them managed to slip the iron box into the coffin before the lid was screwed on. Zach's note bequeathing his 'fortune' to his 'beloved grandson' — in view of what I've seen of his beloved grandson today — was the old fellow's final joke."

Everybody chuckled; but the corpse stared mirthlessly and the silence fell again, to be broken by a weak curse from Andy Bigelow, and Doc Strong's puzzled: "But Mr. Queen, that doesn't explain the murders."

"Well, now, Doc, it does," said Ellery; and then he said in a very different tone: "Suppose we put old Caleb back the way we found him, for your re-exhumation later for autopsy, Doc — and then we'll close the book on your Memorial Day murders."

Ellery closed the book in town, in the dusk, on the porch of Cissy Chase's house, which was central and convenient for everybody. Ellery and Nikki and Doc Strong and Cissy and Andy Bigelow — still clutching the iron box dazedly — were on the porch, and Lew Bagley and Bill Yoder and everyone else in Jacksburg, it seemed, stood about on the lawn and sidewalk, listening. And there was a touch of sadness to the soft twilight air, for something vital and exciting in the life of the village had come to an end.

"There's no trick to this," began Ellery, "and no joke, either, even though the men who were murdered were so old that death had grown tired waiting for them. The answer is as simple as the initials of their last names. Who knew that the supposed fortune was in Confederate money and therefore worthless? Only the three old men. One or another of the three would hardly have planned the deaths of the other two for possession of some scraps of valueless paper. So the murderer has to be someone who believed the fortune was legitimate and who — since until today there was no clue to the money's

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hiding place — knew he could claim it legally.

"Now, of course, that last-survivor-take-all business was pure moonshine, invented by Caleb, Zach, and Abner for their own amusement and the mystification of the community. But the would-be murderer didn't know that. The would-be murderer went on the assumption that the *whole* story was true, or he wouldn't have planned murder in the first place.

"Who would be able to claim the fortune legally if the last of the three old men — the survivor who presumably came into possession of the fortune on the deaths of the other two — died in his turn?"

"Last survivor's heir," said Doc Strong, and he rose.

"And who is the last survivor's heir?"

"*Zach Bigelow's grandson, Andy.*" And the little mayor of Jacksburg stared hard at Bigelow, and a grumbling sound came from the people below, and Bigelow shrank against the wall behind Cissy, as if to seek her protection. But Cissy moved away.

"You thought the fortune was real," Cissy said scornfully, "so you killed Caleb Atwell and my great-grandpa so your grandfather'd be the last survivor so you could kill him and get the fortune."

"That's it, Ellery," cried Nikki.

"Unfortunately, Nikki, that's not it at all. You all refer to Zach Bigelow as the last survivor —"

"Well, he was," said Nikki.

"How could he not be?" said Doc Strong. "Caleb and Abner died first —"

"Literally, that's true," said Ellery, "but what you've all forgotten is that Zach Bigelow was the last survivor *only by accident.* When Abner Chase died early this morning, was it through poisoning, or some other violent means? No, Doc, you were absolutely positive he'd died of a simple cerebral hemorrhage — not by violence, but a natural death. Don't you see that if Abner Chase hadn't died a natural death early this morning, *he'd still be alive this evening?* Zach Bigelow would have put that bugle to his lips this afternoon, just as he did, just as Caleb Atwell did a year ago . . . *and at this moment Abner Chase would have been the last survivor.*

"And who was Abner Chase's only living heir, the girl who would have fallen heir to Abner's 'fortune' when, in time, or through her assistance, he joined his cronies in the great bivouac on the other side?

"You lied to me, Cissy," said Ellery to the shrinking girl in his grip, as a horror very like the horror of the burying ground in the afternoon came over the crowd of mesmerized Jacksburgers. "You pretended you didn't believe the story of the fortune. But that was only after your great-grandfather had inconsiderately died of a stroke just a few hours before old Zach would have died of poisoning, and you couldn't inherit that great, great fortune, anyway!"

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